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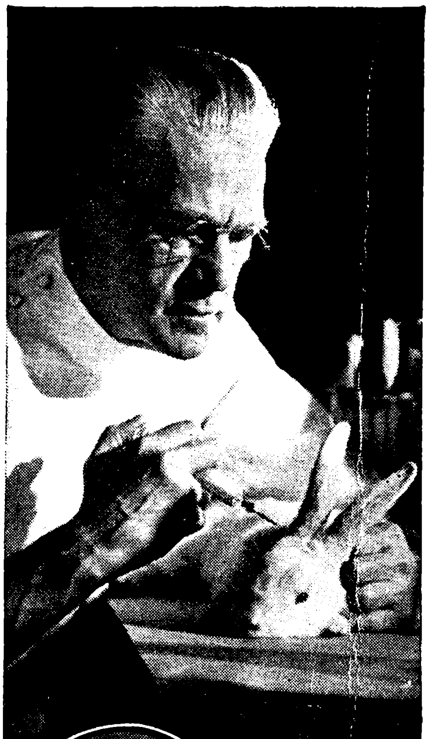

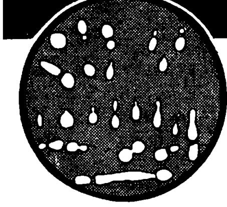

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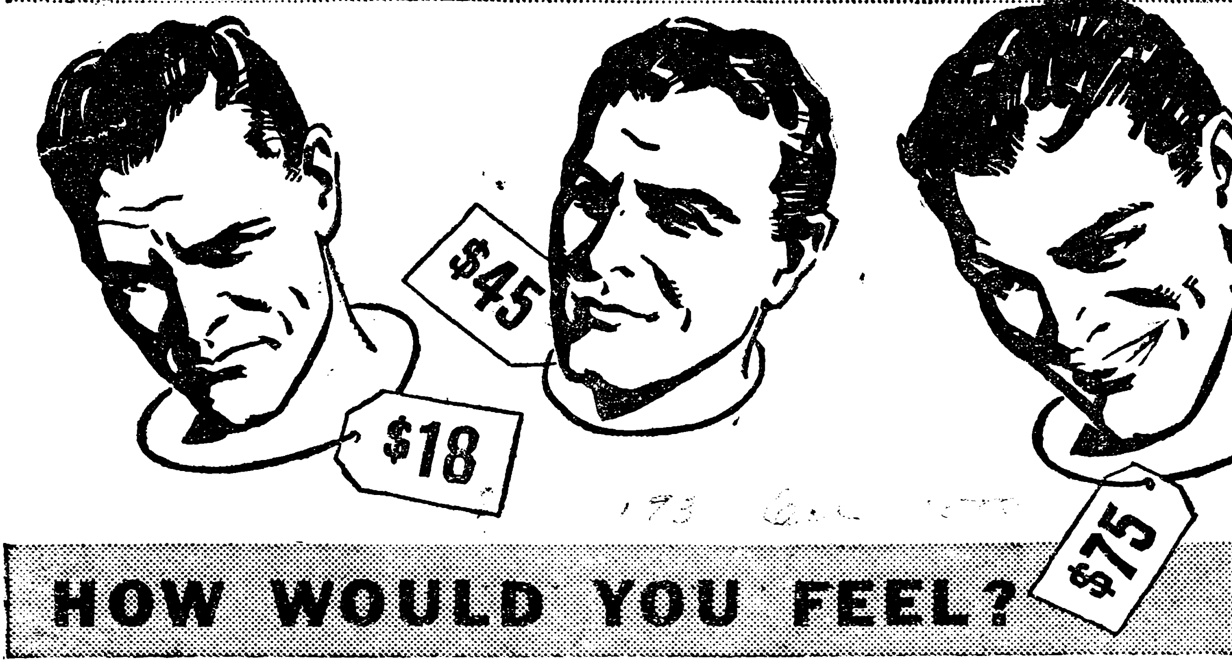

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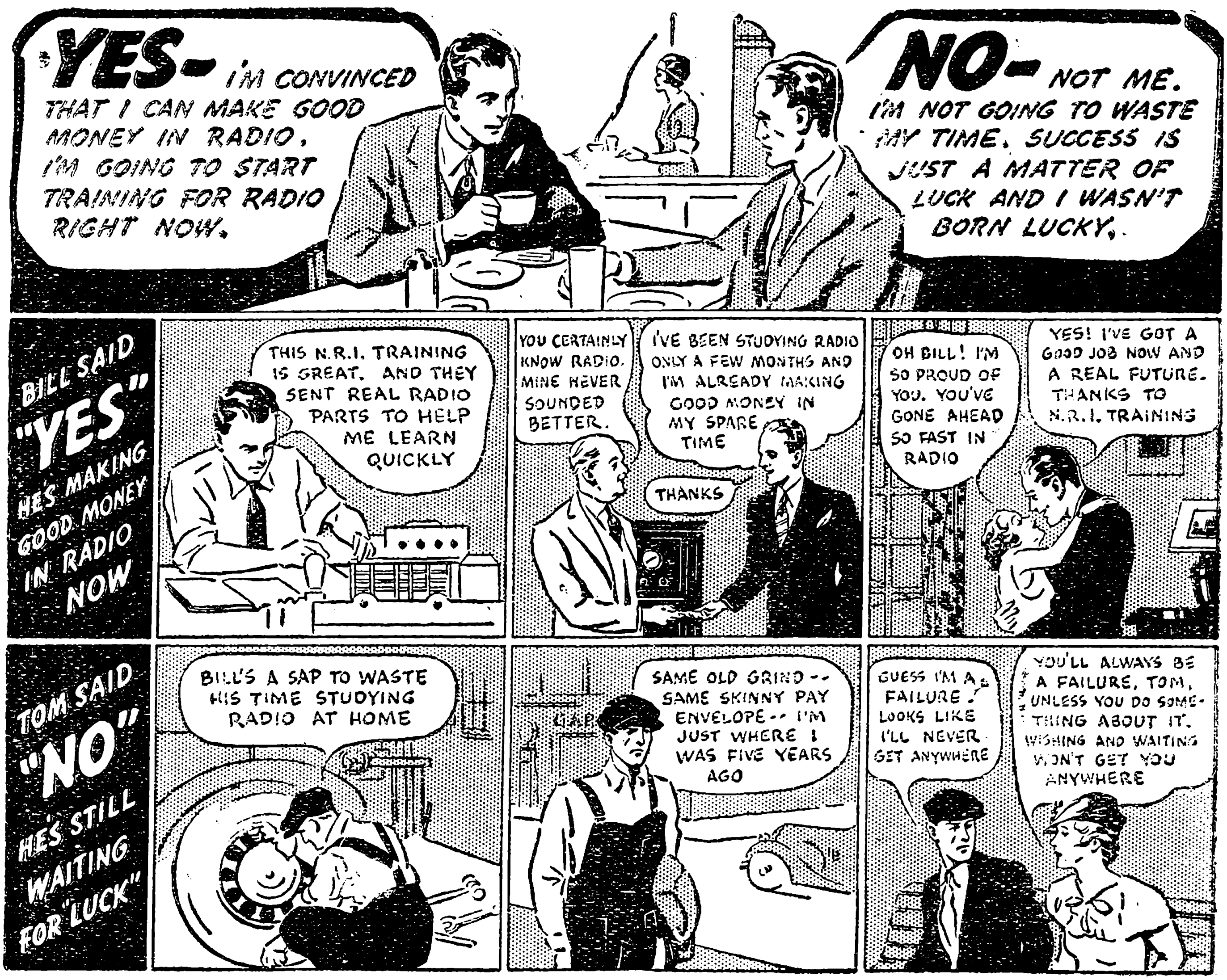
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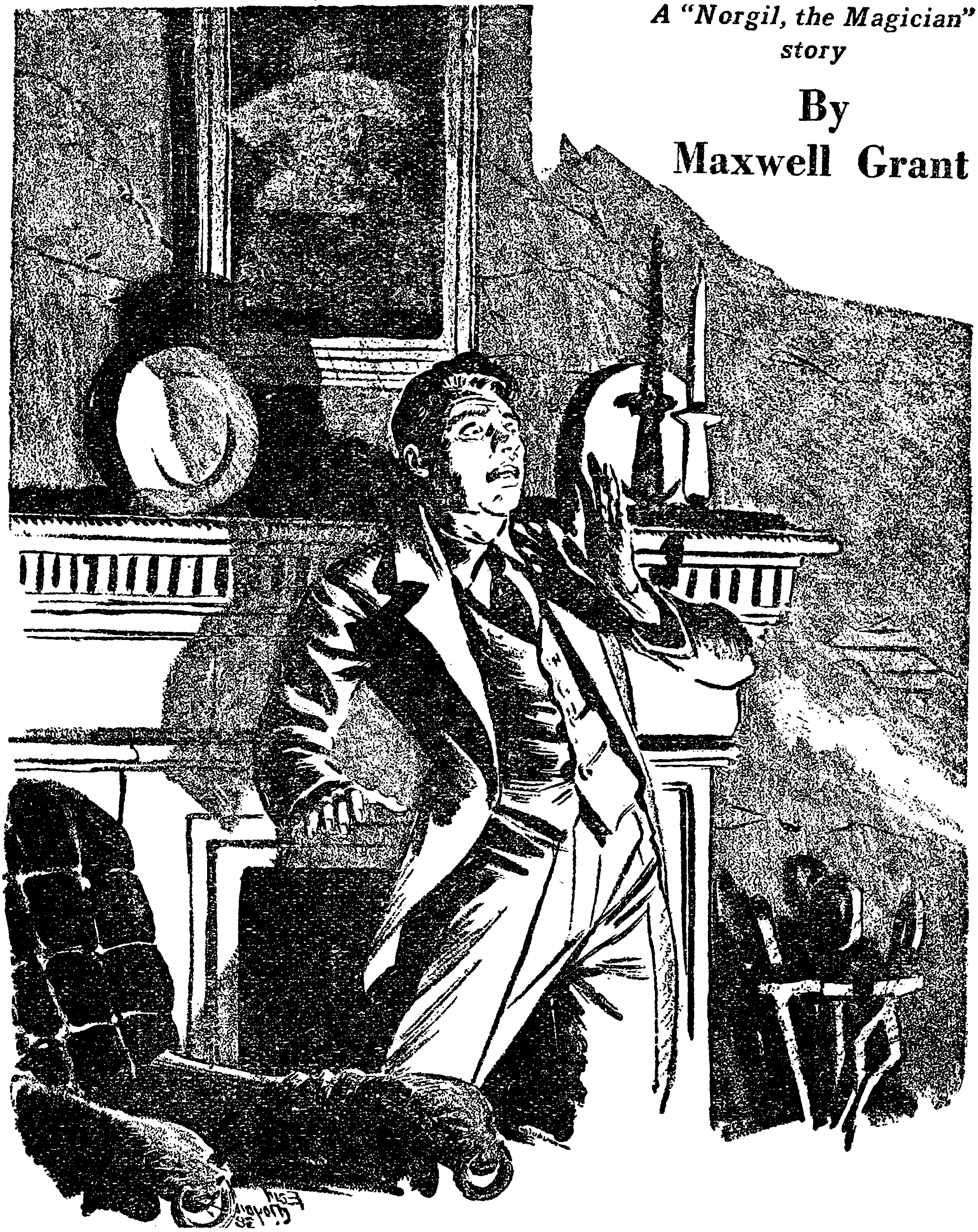
THE GHOST THAT

A "Norgil, the Magician" story

By

Maxwell Grant



CHAPTER I.

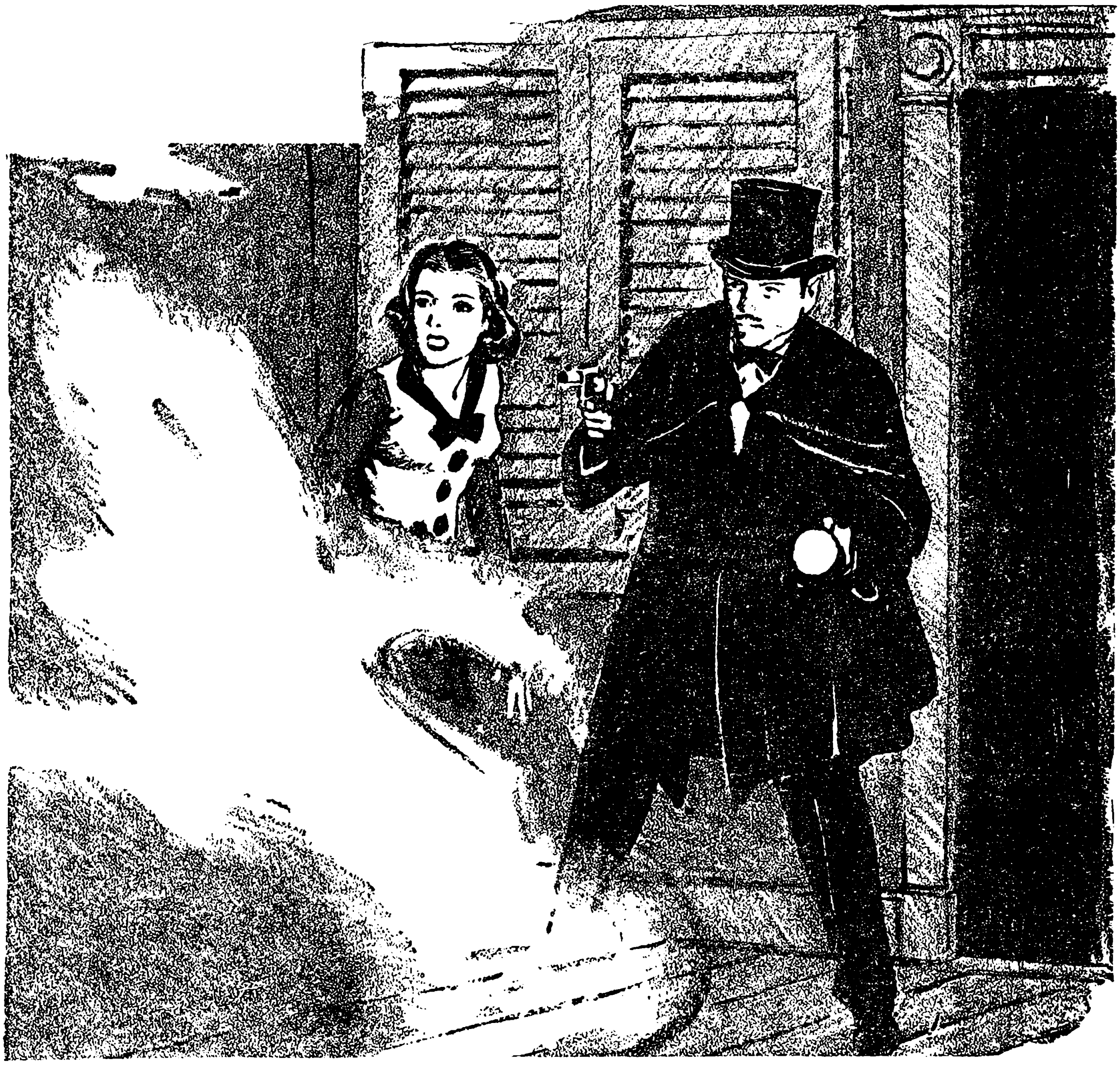
THE GHOST HOUSE.

SILENT, black, misshapen, the old house sprawled in hazy outline beneath cloud-filtered moonlight. From its squatty, pillared front spread low, queer-roofed wings. Beyond those wings the gabled center of the building blended against the background of a cypress grove.

Those big trees were like sentinels guarding this forgotten spot. The

CAME BACK *to find death as its final heritage!*

evasive *clunk-clunk* of the frogs might well have come, not from the surrounding swamp, but from the strange mansion itself. When the slight wind stirred, great tufts of Spanish moss waved from tree boughs, like warning hands ordering all venturers away.



Behind the wheel of the parked coupé, Norgil, the magician, kept an intent gaze upon the bizarre scene, while he purred a question to the girl beside him:

"Still jittery, Miriam?"

"No. Not exactly." Miriam Laymond was firm in tone. "Only the place really *is* ghostly."

"It ought to be," assured Norgil. "Old Roger Clendon kept on building it until the day he died, because he thought that spirits guided him. Which makes it a real ghost house if ever there was one."

Miriam sat silent. Secretly, she wished that she was back in the hotel at Salacca. She could hardly believe that they were less than a dozen miles from that small but prosperous Southern city. She hadn't bargained for a sight so weird as the old house near the swamp when Norgil had invited her to accompany him upon this secret survey.

"Tomorrow," mused Norgil, "I am to visit this house officially, and spend the night alone here. From the scientific standpoint, I am to learn if the place is actually haunted, as some natives testify. Actually, my sojourn will prove a real publicity stunt for my magic show."

Miriam knew all that. She supplied a suggestion of her own.

"Let's get back to town," she said. "Forget the ghosts until tomorrow."

Norgil chuckled as he gave the girl's shoulder a reassuring pat.

"Stay right here," he told her. "If you want me, I'll be on the second floor, right under that funny-looking gable, in the room where old Clendon died."

Miriam started a protest. Half out of the car, Norgil quieted her, reminding her that she had a gun and that the spooks—if there were any—would probably confine themselves to the house itself. He would only be gone a quarter hour, he told her, but the visit might prove important.

"Something may come up to queer the stunt tomorrow," said the magician. "Hugo Clendon—the old man's nephew—is due in town, and he may reverse the lawyer's decision which allows me to visit the house.

"So I'm staging the trip on my own, in advance, and you're the witness, Miriam. Tell you what. I'll blink a light when I reach the top room, and if I stay there more than ten minutes"—Norgil added a chuckle—"you can come up and get me."

Moving from the spot where the coupé was hidden beneath moss-boughed trees, Norgil crossed an open space to the house. He had chosen a timely moment for his advance, as the clouds had just formed a thick blanket that dwindled the straggly moonlight.

Even from her vantage point, Miriam could not see the magician's arrival beneath the sheltering wall, where Norgil groped for a door that he had spied during moments of better visibility.

THE door was unlocked. That was hardly necessary, for it was so rickety upon its hinges that it served no longer as a barrier. Once inside, Norgil moved along a floor that creaked despite his constant efforts to avoid all sound.

Cautious with his flashlight, Norgil investigated rooms on the ground floor. A few were furnished, the rest bare; but all were dusty, and showed signs of long neglect. Though old Roger Clendon had died only a month or so ago, he had paid no attention to the finished portions of the house. Whenever a new room was built, the old man had moved into it. That policy had been part of the mania which had induced him to continually add sections to the house.

To Norgil, ghosts were fables. Nevertheless, he investigated so-called haunted houses in scientific style. In this case, allowing that there could be a ghost, it would necessarily be the specter of old Roger Clendon. That was why Norgil made for the gabled portion of the building, the last section that the dead owner had inhabited.

Looking for a stairway, Norgil found a door that pushed open into a rear passage. It was lucky that he was keeping his flashlight focused on the floor. One step farther would have carried him into a gaping pit. The passage, about the size of a small pantry, had never been floored.

Solid cement marked the cellar, nearly ten feet below. Flicking the light upward, Norgil saw another cavity where there should have been a high ceiling. That was something to remember: a floorless room above.

Reversing his course, Norgil found a stairway near the front of the house. He creaked his way to the second floor and followed a hallway toward the room beneath the gables. He reached it, an apartment of ample size that formed a dead end in the unfinished house.

A curious room, as sprawly as the house itself, with paneled walls that extended into tiny alcoves. Norgil saw large doorless closets, two gaping from side corners, a third at the very rear of the room.

In one alcove was a narrow, rickety couch that had probably been Clendon's deathbed. In another, near a window that Norgil had noted from the car, was a table with an old oil lamp resting upon it.

Lighting the lamp, Norgil moved it slightly so that it would shine against the drawn shade. Moving between, he stood there a few moments so that Miriam could observe his silhouette, from outside. Then, edging toward a deeper corner, Norgil surveyed the room.

LAMPLIGHT rendered the apartment even spookier than had the darkness. The wavers of the flame, caused by a faulty wick, seemed tremors produced through the touch of an unseen hand. Chairs and their shadows were distorted by the uneven glow. Everywhere, enroaching darkness was like a waiting monster, ready to engulf the pitiful light, once it remained unwatched.

Again, Norgil reminded himself that he had no faith in ghosts. He needed that self-encouragement. No wonder old Clendon had hobnobbed with imaginary spooks.

Shrugging away his own imagination, Norgil turned toward a corner closet, began to inspect it with his flashlight. He was conscious of a tenseness, the sort that enlarged the trifling sounds that were common to the old house.

There was a soft rustle from behind him. Norgil explained it mentally as a slight flutter of the window shade. The sound persisted. With instinct surmounting reason, Norgil inched his head by degrees, until he gained a slanted view across his right shoulder.

It wasn't imagination. Against the window shade, he saw a shadowy profile of a woman, recognizable by the fluff of hair above the forehead. Norgil's lips formed a smile. If Miriam thought she could turn the tables and give him a fright, she had made a bad guess. Moving in between the light and the window was a giveaway on which the girl hadn't calculated.

Sudden tenseness halted Norgil before he could wheel about. Something else had come into that picture against the window screen—a hand, moving forward with determination. In it, the unmistakable outline of a pointing revolver!

THE gun was aiming for Norgil's neck, so close that he could fancy he felt its chill. He didn't wait to see a shadowy finger twitch. He made a whirl about, that turned into a long, desperate dive. The gun roared just above his ducking head.

The singe that scorched the magician's wavy hair gave added urge to his drive. He bowled his feminine antagonist half across the room, knocking the gun from her fist with a hard swing of his arm. A few seconds later, he had her arms clamped; his eyes were meeting those of a frightened girl whose face betrayed astonishment along with fear.

Norgil was right. The girl wasn't Miriam. She was a blonde, a direct contrast to the brunette who had stayed in the car. Quick of emotion, the blonde had changed from a would-be murderess into a frail, terrified creature. Again, her mood altered. Fright fading, she spoke in a voice that choked with apology, rather than dread.

"I'm sorry," the girl admitted. "I—well, I made a mistake. I thought you were someone else."

Norgil released his grip and stood with folded arms. Apparently, the girl hadn't realized that her own statement was a confession that she had come here with intent to kill.

Such a situation called for suavity. Norgil provided it as he deftly scooped the revolver from the floor and let the weapon nest idly in his hands.

"So there is someone?" he remarked, smoothly. "Someone who might have been here; someone whom you would willingly have killed——"

The blonde nodded at Norgil's uncompleted statement. Then, in simple, naïve tone that matched the calmness of her blue-eyed stare, she added the words that astounded Norgil even more.

"Yes," said the girl. "There is such a man. He is my brother."

CHAPTER II.

WHERE DEATH FAILED.

MASTERED by amazement, Norgil nearly dropped the revolver that he held. The calm-spoken blonde could have grabbed the gun, had she so chosen. The fact that she ignored it was further evidence that she was stirred by unusual motives. Though prepared to kill her own brother, she was quite wiling to trust a stranger that she had met in this weird house!

Before Norgi could down his surprise and put further questions, his attention was diverted elsewhere. Again, he caught tokens of an approach, the sounds of creeping footsteps from the hallway.

The blonde heard them, too. She made a snatch for the gun, but Norgil pawed her aside. He covered the doorway in such businesslike fashion that the girl was satisfied. She felt that Norgil was quite capable of dealing with any new intruder.

A revolver muzzle poked in from the doorway. Norgil saw the hand that gripped it. With an easy chuckle, he lowered his gun, to the blonde's surprise. The girl was treated to another surprise when the new intruder entered.

It was Miriam; and she, too, was bewildered. She had heard the shot and had hurried up from the car, expecting to find anything from a corpse to a ghost, but certainly not a blue-eyed blonde.

"Hello, Miriam," greeted Norgil. "Allow me to introduce Miss——"

He turned to the blonde.

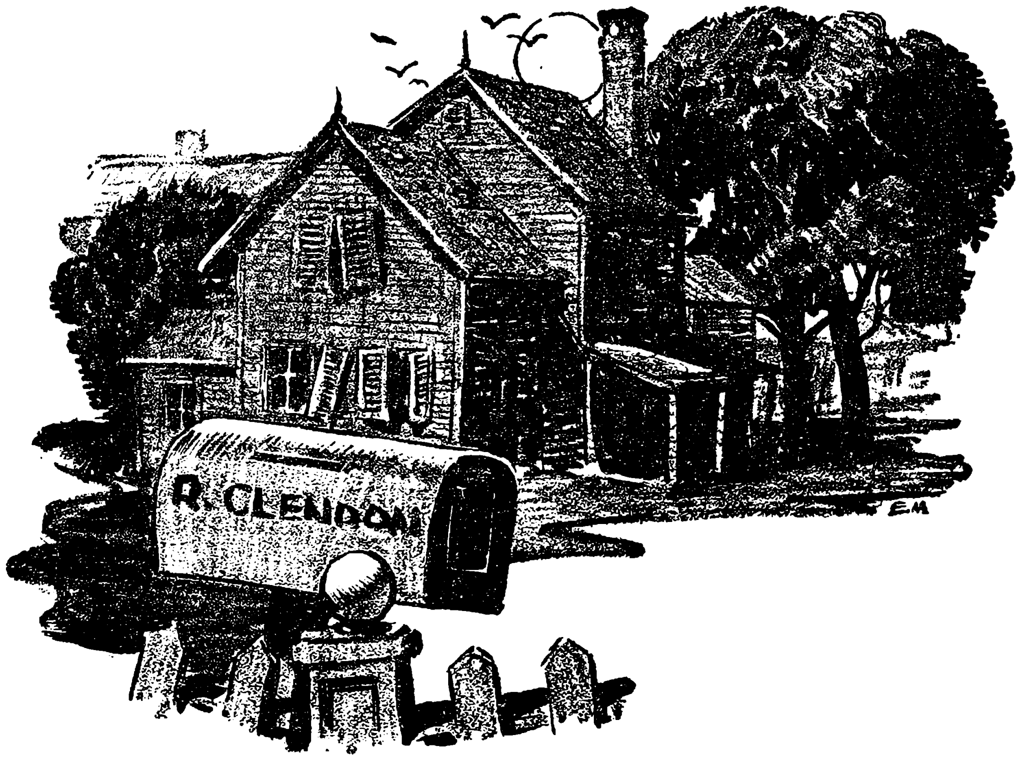
"Clendon," she completed. "Thelma Clendon. The man who owned this house was my uncle, Roger Clendon."

Norgil whistled very softly.

"Then your brother must be Hugo Clendon," remarked the magician. "The chap who has final say about my visit here tomorrow night."

Norgil's tone showed mistrust of Hugo. It was all that Thelma needed to pour forth her pent-up story.

"Hugo is to blame for everything!" the blonde insisted. "He encouraged my uncle's mania, hoping to have him put in an asylum. When that failed, Hugo murdered him!"



Doubt showed on Norgil's face. It was his way of encouraging the girl to give more details.

"Hugo was after Uncle Roger's money," Thelma explained. "He didn't want him to waste it all on his crazy idea. I don't know how he managed the murder, but he must have. That's why I came back here—to watch for Hugo."

"The money is here?" questioned Norgil.

"It must be," replied Thelma. "Uncle Roger was very wealthy, although few people would believe it. But he left very little to Hugo and myself. He intended that wealth for me, because I cared for him. But I was away when he died."

Strain was telling on the girl. Norgil told Miriam to take her to the car. He listened until he heard the side door close below, then began another prowl about the room.

THELMA'S story had logic. Norgil had wondered what had prompted old Clendon's odd notions, and now he had the answer in one word: Hugo. But the nephew's cute plot to have the old man declared insane had evidently failed. Murder could have been the next step, as Thelma had suggested.

Such speculation was a bad habit with Norgil. He had a way of concentration that made him forget trivial things about him, and his stage performances had encouraged that mental process. He was moving mechanically when he came to the yawning closet at the rear of the room.

At the fringe of the glow from the oil lamp, Norgil was reaching in his pocket for his flashlight. The action ended his chain of thought; he was again fully conscious of his surroundings, but too late to combat a sudden invasion that came.

Footsteps clumped from the hallway. Twisting about, his hand gunless, Norgil saw two men spring into sight. Both were rough-clad, their faces masked. One was tall, to string-bean proportions; the other middle-sized, and chunky.

Each had a gun, and the square-set man was already taking aim. It was his voice that rasped:

"Stick 'em up, guy!"

Norgil let his hands start upward; then, with a swing of his arms, he carried his body into a complete spin that ended with a lunge through the closet door. With that spring, Norgil found space below him.

The closet was the floorless room above the unfinished pantry, which in turn had void beneath it!

ALL sounds of Norgil's plunge were drowned by the gun bursts that roared through the room the magician had so suddenly left. With a viciousness that suited his hard tone, the chunky marksman stabbed three quick shots into the closet. He would have emptied his revolver, except for the intervention of his string-bean companion.

"Hold it, Trigger!" snapped the taller man. "What're you shootin' at? I don't see nobody."

"I seen a guy, Stretch," retorted "Trigger." "He looked like he was reachin' for a rod when he ducked."

"He didn't duck," corrected "Stretch." "He took a dive, if he went through that door. Clear down to the cellar. Let's take a gander."

Reaching the closet, Stretch leaned over the edge and thrust a long flashlight downward. When he pressed the switch, a bull's-eye glow spotted the concrete twenty feet below. Stretch lifted his bandanna mask in order to gawk.

"There ain't nobody down there!" he voiced hoarsely. "You was seein' things, Trigger!"

Raising his own mask, Trigger peered. The big flashlight moved about in Stretch's hand. As the fellow said, the pit was empty, complete proof that no one could have plunged to the cellar floor. Even if a man survived that drop, he could not have crawled away in a mere dozen seconds.

"Yeah," gruffed Trigger, "I guess I was seein' things. But you was hearin' things, Stretch, when he was outside. There wasn't no shootin' in here, like you said."

Stretch looked nervously toward the flickery lamp. He muttered that somebody must have been here, but that made him recall that he had just denied the fact. He began to suspect a trap, one that had been set by hands other than human.

"Maybe we was both wrong," admitted Stretch. "But you just done some shootin' that was real enough. C'mon, Trigger, let's lam."

Trigger was more than agreeable to the suggestion. The pair made a hurried exit out through the hallway. Both were thinking in terms of ghosts, which spurred their departure. They went out by the route that they had used for entry, on the opposite side of the house.

IN their hurry, the toughs were away before Miriam and Thelma arrived from the car. Fearing that real disaster had befallen Norgil, the girls hurried up to the second floor. Seeing no sign of the magician, Thelma grasped what might have happened. She pointed to the floorless closet.

The distant chug of a departing motor caused the girls to halt their inspection of the pit. The thought flashed to Miriam that Norgil had been abducted. Before she could voice it, a chuckle intervened.

In from the hallway stepped Norgil, suave as ever. He nodded when he saw Thelma still pointing to the pit. Extinguishing the lamp, Norgil used his flashlight to conduct the girls to the ground floor. He stopped at the pantry door, which he pushed halfway inward.

"I had left the door this way," explained Norgil, "and I remembered it when those fellows barged in on me. I took a long chance, but it was the best way to avoid an argument that included bullets."

Rubbing his hands and spreading his numbered fingers, Norgil finally pointed to the top of the half-opened door.

"I grabbed it, all right," he recounted. "It was a hard jolt, but not like the one I'd have taken from the cellar floor. I swung out into this hall and closed the door. I was gone before those fellows took a look.

"That's why they won't be back. From the way they hurried out, they must have believed they saw a ghost. If Hugo sent them, they won't come back without him. Maybe they'll have him believing the place is really haunted."

Out in the car, Norgil and his companions waited amid the unceasing croak of the frogs. When an uninterrupted hour had passed, the magician decided that the crooks would not return.

"Tomorrow will be soon enough," he predicted. "That's when we'll learn just how Hugo stands."

With that, Norgil eased the coupé from beneath the trees. Soon its fading tail-light marked the final departure from the house where death had failed.

CHAPTER III.

THE DOUBLE CROSS.

NORGIL met Hugo Clendon the next afternoon. The meeting took place in the little office of Thaddeus Fennimore, lawyer for the Clendon estate. Since the day was sultry, the conference was held in shirt sleeves, but that informality had no effect upon Norgil's well-formed opinions.

From the moment of meeting, he had Hugo marked. Thelma was correct in her estimate of her murderous brother. On the surface, Hugo Clendon was friendly and presentable, enough so to deceive the citizens in his home town of Salacca.

His exterior consisted of a well-formed, aristocratic face, topped by a flow of marcelled hair. Hugo's eyes were direct, his smile almost habitual. He could become solemn, too, when he referred to his poor, deceased uncle. That was all part of his oily sham.

Old Roger Clendon had died of heart failure while alone in the house. An attack had apparently rendered him unable to take the necessary medicine that the physician had left with him, for the pills had been found untouched beside his body.

The question in Norgil's mind was whether or not old Roger had received a visit from his nephew, Hugo, on that fatal night. Only one person could reveal that fact; namely, Hugo, himself.

From the very start of the conference, Hugo showed the canniness that Norgil expected. Hugo was sorry that lawyer Fennimore had given Norgil permission to spend this night in the old house. Hugo's chief argument was that he didn't care to have his uncle's name submitted to disrespect. Norgil disputed that point.

"Everyone thinks the place is haunted," declared the magician. "If I can put an end to that superstition, your uncle's name will be less mentioned. Besides"—Norgil edged a glance toward Fennimore—"there will be a better chance of selling the house."

"Quite so," assured Fennimore.

"You must remember, Hugo, that your sister Thelma has a half interest in that property."

Neither Hugo nor Fennimore knew that Thelma was in town. She was staying secretly at the hotel, with Miriam, and Norgil was counting upon her as a trump card, if needed. But Hugo was already calculating that a compromise would be his best policy.

Norgil could see that Hugo classed Fennimore as a withery old fossil whose opinions were worthless. On this occasion, however, the nephew pretended to be swayed by the lawyer's opinion.

"Very well," agreed Hugo. "The house is yours, Norgil, but for tonight only. One stay there should be sufficient."

"It's all I can afford," returned Norgil. "The show is opening tomorrow, and I'll be busy after that. One night in the house is all I want."

There was thin-veiled confidence in the magician's tone, calculated to arouse Hugo's curiosity. It did. For a moment, the bland young man betrayed a flicker of suspicion. Then:

"Suppose we go out to the house this afternoon," suggested Hugo. "It's been a long while since I've seen the place. I'd like to look it over before you begin your venture."

BY daylight, there was nothing ominous about the crazy-shaped structure that old Roger Clendon had built. When the three disembarked from Norgil's coupé, they entered the house by the front door and began an inspection.

Norgil observed places where plaster was missing, spots where chunks of floor had obviously been repaired. When he remarked upon the fact, Hugo supplied an explanation. His uncle, so he said, had constantly subjected the house to alterations, along with his mania for building further.

Fennimore supported that statement, but Norgil gained a definite belief that the lawyer knew only part of the story. From his own scrutiny, Norgil classed some of the work as recent. His theory was that Hugo and others—like Stretch and Trigger—had been secret visitors here in search of hidden wealth.

Hugo led the way down to the cellar. While there, he noted suddenly that he was alone with Fennimore. They set out to find Norgil, and located him on the second floor, in the room beneath the gables. The magician had been out to the car and had brought back a tool kit, with a square box that contained a curious-looking motor.

"What's that thing?" queried Hugo. "You didn't tell me you were bringing any contraptions here."

"It's a magnetic-finder," explained Norgil, seriously. "If I hear any strange sounds tonight, I intend to locate them. Sometimes there are hidden causes of ghostly manifestations."

Sidelonging a look toward Hugo, Norgil could tell that the bland man wished he had thought of using an electrical device himself. There wasn't a doubt that Hugo believed treasure was hidden in the house. He was beginning to worry that Norgil might find it, but Hugo's expression soon became relieved.

Norgil had apparently forgotten that the house wasn't wired for electricity. He picked the box up from the battered flooring. Lugging it to the coupé, Norgil remarked that he would have to rig it up with storage batteries, in order to operate it tonight.

They had dropped Fennimore at

his office, when Hugo again referred to the curious motor.

"You're going at this thing in a scientific way," he approved. "But there's one thing you don't want to forget, Norgil. That's a gun. There are vagrants around this section. Some of them might happen in on the old house."

Norgil assured Hugo that he would be armed. That brought up another point.

"You'd better have a local permit," advised Hugo, "allowing you to carry a gun. I'll stop up and have Fennimore arrange for one. It's merely a formality, though, in these parts."

They parted, after Hugo accepted Norgil's invitation to drop in at the hotel after dinner. By that time, Norgil promised, he would have the magnetic-finder in operation.

DARK had settled when the desk clerk phoned Norgil to inform him that Hugo was downstairs. Crossing the hall, Norgil poked his head into Miriam's room and told her to be ready. Returning to his suite, he received Hugo in a little sitting room. They hung their coats on chair backs and went into the bedroom.

There, behind a closed door, Norgil demonstrated the motor. He showed how silent, whirring blades lessened their speed when he brought certain metals close to them. Hugo didn't suspect that the apparatus was merely a trick device, intended to worry him.

Nor did he guess that Miriam had stolen into the sitting room and gone again, after accomplishing a very important mission. Hugo was falling quite nicely for the clever set-up that Norgil had planned. It happened, though, that Hugo had a counterscheme of his own.

They had returned to the sitting room, and Norgil was putting on his coat in preparation for his trip to the old house, when someone knocked at the door. Norgil opened it, to face a square-jawed man who wore a badge upon the left strap of his suspenders.

"I'm Sheriff Curry," announced the newcomer. "You're Norgil, ain't you?"

Norgil acknowledged his identity. Shifting his cud of tobacco, the sheriff added casually:

"Reckon you'll be needing a gun when you go out to that Clendon house."

"I have one."

Norgil produced the revolver. The sheriff plucked it from him. Wagging the weapon by its barrel, he asked Norgil for the permit. Hugo intervened, hotly.

"Mr. Fennimore fixed that!" exclaimed Hugo. "This is an outrage, sheriff. I can explain——"

"You don't need to do no explaining," interposed the sheriff. "This fellow"—he nudged his thumb toward Norgil—"is the one that's got to do it. We're strict on the law around these parts."

Pocketing the revolver, the sheriff clamped a heavy hand on Norgil's shoulder and added a statement that meant much more than the sheriff himself knew.

"Guess you'll have to try our jail tonight, Norgil," said the sheriff. "You can pay your fine when the judge gets here in the morning. Kinda sorry about this, but law's law."

From the doorway, Norgil saw Hugo hurriedly putting on his coat, promising that he would look up Fennimore and arrange for the magician's prompt release. But that talk was empty, as Norgil had realized it would be, from the moment of his arrest.

The tip-off to the sheriff had been arranged by Hugo Clendon. Master of the double cross, that smug young man had planned a perfect way to prevent the magician's visit to the haunted house. Hugo wasn't going to find Fennimore.

Instead, he was planning a trip of his own to the premises where he knew that treasure lay, hoping that on this last opportunity, he and his helpers could uncover the wealth that his dead uncle had buried!

CHAPTER IV.

GHOST OF VENGEANCE.

IT wasn't far to the county jail, but the way seemed long to Norgil. His arrest had placed him in a double dilemma. His captor, the sheriff, was a man upon whom he had hoped to depend, later tonight.

Even if Norgil argued himself out of the present fix, he would have trouble convincing Sheriff Curry that he expected human visitors at the old house. It would sound too much like an alibi to cover the matter of the gun.

Any argument would be useless, however. The sheriff was considerate enough, but he was stubborn; otherwise Hugo would not have counted upon him. Furthermore, the jail looked formidable the moment that Norgil entered it.

That was something else that Hugo probably knew, but neither he nor the sheriff were conversant with Norgil's ability as a jail-breaker. Norgil had a reputation along that line that outmatched his fame as a ghost-hunter.

A turnkey unlocked the steel door of a cell. Norgil halted before the sheriff could motion him inside it. From his pocket, the magician drew a wallet and extracted a fifty-dollar bill. Spreading the note between his hands, he began:

"By the way, sheriff——"

"What's this!" interposed Curry. "A bribe? I'm warning you, I have a witness!"

"A bribe?" Norgil's tone seemed shocked. "No, no, sheriff. I was merely wondering if I had enough money to pay my fine tomorrow."

"Fifty dollars will cover it," assured the sheriff. "But put that money out of sight. I don't collect fines. The judge does."

Norgil crumpled the bill and shoved his hand into his pocket. But that wasn't where the fifty dollars went. Norgil's other hand slid behind him; moving down the door frame, his deft fingers found the latch socket. Into it, Norgil stuffed the wadded note.

THE door had an automatic lock that clicked in convincing fashion. Sheriff and turnkey went their way, leaving the imprisoned magician to his worries. Those didn't concern Norgil more than a few minutes.

Gripping the bars of the door, Norgil threw all his weight away from the latch side, then supplied a hard shove with his shoulder. The door jolted open. Norgil reclaimed his fifty-dollar bill and closed the cell door behind him.

Choosing a roundabout course, he reached the hotel. When Norgil tattooed a signal on Miriam's door, she opened it in astonishment. Thelma was there with her; and both thought that Norgil had already started for the haunted house.

Norgil told what had happened. Calculating that Hugo had gained nearly half an hour's start, he planned a campaign to meet the circumstances.

"I wanted you to drop in on the sheriff," Norgil told Thelma. "But that plan is out. Instead, you'll stay with me. Miriam can go over to the jail instead."

"But what will I tell the sheriff?" questioned Miriam.

"Just say that you would like to speak with me," chuckled Norgil. "Sheriff Curry is a gentleman. He will escort you to my cell. After that, all will take care of itself."

Taking Thelma with him, Norgil started on Hugo's trail. The coupé was in a parking lot. In a few minutes, they were away from the street lamps of the town and speeding beneath the moonlight of the clear night.

"A half hour," repeated Norgil. "Hugo's at the house by this time. But that won't matter. He thinks he has the whole night ahead of him."

THAT picture was correct. Outside the old house, Hugo Clendon was approaching from the glade where he had parked his car. After a cautious look about him, he made rapid steps across the moonlit clearing, slackening only when he came beneath the shelter of the pillared portico.

There, Hugo buzzed a signal. Men answered from inside the front door. Stretch and Trigger were awaiting their chief, and they were but two of a half-dozen lurkers posted within the darkened house.

"Norgil's in the hoosegow," informed Hugo. "We'll rip this place from top to bottom. Come along with me, Trigger, while I pick up some of the crew."

From the front door, Stretch glanced into the darkness that engulfed Hugo and Trigger. A sudden, gaspy sound came from the tall man's lips. The others took it for a signal, and turned about.

"What's up?" voiced Hugo. "See anything?"

"Yeah!" panted Stretch. "I—well, I thought I saw somethin'—a face, lookin' from inside there. Only, it's gone——"

"Forget it," snapped Hugo. "Come on, Trigger."

The pair crept deeper. Stretch rubbed his chin, and took another stare. This time, he couldn't give sound to his attempted gasp. There it was, again!

A ghostly face, shining visibly from the darkness—a sight that was meant for Stretch alone, for neither Hugo nor Trigger noticed it. The thing was weird, its eyes glowing, its lips twisting as if alive!

Old Roger's ghost!

The face was gone as Stretch blinked; then, it returned to view, peering from some doorway. Stretch began a creep of his own, but not in that direction. He reached the portico. Once there, he took it on the run, out into the moonlight.

His goal was a mass of palmetto shrub, thick beneath the cypress trees. Stretch burrowed there, staring back at the house as if he expected its walls to open and emit a horde of phantasms.

Hugo and Trigger had reached a side door, where a pair of men awaited. Hugo posted Trigger there and told the others to come with him. His last instructions to Trigger carried a note of sarcasm.

"Forget this ghost stuff," said Hugo. "Don't let your imagination work the way Stretch's does."

Trigger grunted that he "wouldn't be seein' things," but his thoughts jumped back to the night before, when he had fired shots at an imaginary being.

He was wondering, too, what Stretch had seen from the front door. And as he speculated, Trigger saw it for himself.

A FACE! Hugo and his companions were creeping right toward it, but they couldn't see its luminous outline! The thing grimaced at Trigger. He cringed toward the side door. As the others turned a corner of a passage, Trigger fled.

As maddened a fugitive as Stretch, he reached the palmetto clump and dived for the cover of its crinkly, spreading stalks.

The man that Hugo posted at the opposite side of the house didn't stay there more than half a minute. He, too, saw the shiny face. Knowing nothing of the desertions, Hugo moved three men ahead of him, to the stairs.

He told one to remain at the bottom, the second at the top, while the third was to wait at the doorway of the gabled room where Hugo intended a prelimnary search. Thus Hugo depended upon human links to the lookouts below, but that system went to pieces as soon as his back was turned.

While Hugo and two companions were creeping up the stairway, the man at the bottom saw the ghost on the steps themselves! How it had moved in ahead, was something he didn't try to fathom. He quick-timed it out through the house and took to the scrub.

Soon, the house disgorged two more fugitives in quick succession. The last man heard the cautious call of his waiting pals and shakily gave his testimony.

"It was in the room," he panted, "waitin' for Hugo! I seen it, and started to tell him, but he says to shut up. After that, I done a sneak."

Stretch opinioned that Hugo had "croaked his old uncle" and that the ghost wanted to deal with him alone. They hadn't bargained to fight ghosts, and Hugo's own statement that Norgil was in jail, stood as proof that they weren't dealing with the magician.

The crew retired through the palmettos, until they reached the swamp, where Trigger advised that they "stick around" in case Hugo came out alive. It wasn't good sense to pass up the rewards that he had promised in case he found his uncle's wealth.

MEANWHILE, Hugo was busy in the gabled room. Ignoring the oil lamp, he raised the window shades, bringing streaks of moonlight into the room. He began to tap the paneled walls, hoping to find a hollow spot. The task kept him oblivious to the fact that his followers had deserted.

Hugo reached a corner where the moonlight showed a long crack in the woodwork. He probed the space with his fingers. They encountered what seemed to be a piece of metal. It proved nothing but a small, rusted nail, when Hugo pried it loose. The nail clattered on the floor.

Odd, how the thing echoed. Hugo's ears, strained for sounds, caught a curious *click,* that seemed to come from the center of the room. There was a slight gurgle, too, that Hugo's imagination magnified. The sound was enough to bring the young man about.

Hands planted hard against the walls, Hugo went back into the corner. His eyes were riveted on the middle of the room, where their goggly gaze viewed the incredible. It wasn't just a face that Hugo saw. It was an entire figure, materializing from nowhere!

The thing grew from a pygmy form into a full-size shape. Its weird mass seemed to stretch forth arms. A head lifted from billowy shoulders that narrowed and straightened from their stoop.

As tall as Hugo, the specter poked a vague hand forward, as if grasping for its prey. A fist took on the shape of fingers, ominous in their approaching clutch. A frantic shout came from Hugo, expressing the full emotion that had gripped him.

There wasn't a doubt in Hugo's brain regarding the identity of this specter. His tone told his thoughts, even though his voice was wordless.

Hugo Clendon was faced by the vengeful ghost of his murdered uncle!

CHAPTER V.

DEATH'S HERITAGE.

DURING a few seconds, Hugo's impressions ran the entire gamut of his life, centering finally upon one deed—his murder of his uncle. That thought was like an electric shock that broke his numbness, made him forget the menace of the weird figure that had begun to tower above him.

Moonlight gave solidity to the shape. Anything as real as it looked could be overpowered. A figure in white—some person planted here by Norgil—such was Hugo's sudden idea. With that guess, he whipped his revolver from his hip.

The gun talked, with rapid chatter, under the tug of a finger that didn't halt even when the weapon was emptied. Bullets streamed right through the ghostly shape, to *zing* the wall beyond.

That leaden hail didn't produce a waver; nor did the revolver bring results when Hugo flung it squarely at the shape. Instead, the gun was momentarily engulfed by the ghost, then Hugo heard the weapon thud beneath the opposite window.

Terror supplanted his temporary nerve. Cowering in the corner, Hugo thrust his arm across his eyes. In a hoarse screech, he gave the confession that he thought the specter wanted.

"I killed you! I admit it. That night"—Hugo's phrases were disjointed, though still coherent—"the wrong medicine—I left it, instead of your own.

"That's why you died—but it wasn't murder! I didn't poison you. Those pills I left were harmless—— You died because you needed your own. They were where you could have found them—if you'd known!"

Hugo's babble became a confusion of admitted guilt and denial, until a shaft of brilliant light aroused him to new alarm. Dropping his arm, Hugo stared into the gleam of a flashlight that was focused from the doorway.

THE ghost was gone. Dispelling smoke was all that remained of it, but Hugo recognized the accusing voices that he heard. One tone was Norgil's; the other, that of Hugo's sister, Thelma!

Reaching the unguarded house, they had entered by the front door, in time to hear Hugo's shrieked confession. As Norgil had expected, Hugo's crew had abandoned him, but those wild shots from Hugo's gun were the sort of sound that might bring them back. That was why Norgil gave Thelma the brisk order:

"Keep him covered! I'll take care of the window."

From the window, Norgil heard the roar of arriving cars. The final stage of his plan had worked. The sheriff, finding the magician escaped, had followed with a group of deputies. But those cars weren't employing Norgil's policy of parking silently beneath moss-laden trees.

Men, piling from the cars in the moonlight, were proclaiming themselves as human foes that crooks could fight. Crackles sounded from the palmetto clusters. Guns began to tongue toward the cars.

The posse scattered. Spreading, they would have become easy targets for Hugo's gun crew, except for Norgil's intervention. Sheriff Curry was soon to rejoice because Norgil had more than one revolver in his traveling bag.

From the window, the men who crouched in the low palmetto were plain in the moonlight. When Norgil began to pick them from the flank, they had to look for other cover. Some tried to answer his fire, but he was low beneath the sill. Giving up that effort, the crooks popped above the level of the palmetto and scrambled for the swamp.

THAT began the roundup, while Norgil peppered helpful shots from a reloaded gun. Soon, Trigger, Stretch and the rest were being hauled to the cars. Accompanied by Miriam and two deputies, Sheriff Curry came up to the gabled room.

Norgil was lighting the oil lamp, while Thelma still kept Hugo covered with gun and flashlight. Dragged from his corner, Hugo could not deny his disjointed confession when he heard it repeated by two witnesses.

Smiling when he heard the sheriff's compliments, Norgil waved his hand toward the floor.

"Some credit," he remarked, "belongs to the ghost."

"The ghost?" queried the sheriff.

Norgil nodded. Hugo stared from the chair where they had planked him. He watched Norgil pry up two loose floorboards that had a space between. Hugo saw a small tin box, with two compartments, a wire running between floorboards to the crack in the corner wall.

"A simple experiment in chemistry," elucidated Norgil, "can become a weird manifestation under the right conditions, such as moonlight, or, as might have been the case, in the glow of an oil lamp.

"In one side we have hydrochloric acid; in the other, ammonia. When Hugo loosened the nail that controlled the valve wire, this happened."

Norgil gave the box a slight shake. The chemical result was repeated. Smoke formed as the liquids united. It curled up from the box in an increasing mass of white. Even when the process was recognized, the vapor seemed to take a living shape, stirring into cloudy forms that were grotesquely human.

"I placed it here this afternoon," stated Norgil, "when I was making that bluff with the apparatus I called a magnetic-finder. Which reminds me, sheriff, that a search of this house is still in order."

WITHIN an hour, the sheriff's dozen men had found the buried wealth that Hugo had been seeking by clandestine visits to the house. It was buried beneath a downstairs fireplace, a small chest containing more than a hundred thousand dollars in currency and bonds, the legacy that old Roger Clendon had left for his niece, Thelma.

They brought the chest to the gabled room, where Hugo stared sullenly at the contents, to which he—a confessed criminal—could claim no legal share. But Hugo had long ago decided upon other methods of acquiring wealth he wanted.

Chance gave him a break. Norgil was starting from the room with Thelma and Miriam; two deputies were lifting the coffer, when the sheriff clamped a hand on Hugo's shoulder. Springing up from his huddly position, Hugo supplied a surprise thrust that sent the sheriff against the table.

The sputtery wick was extinguished when the oil lamp crashed. Setting beyond the trees, the moon provided no more glow. It was black in that room where a murderer was loose. In their spring for Hugo, the deputies misjudged their target.

Hugo didn't seek a scuffle with the sheriff. He wanted the contents of the box. Only Norgil guessed that, and made in the right direction. He was met by the blundering deputies as they turned about. They were mistaking the magician for Hugo, when something new appeared upon the scene, so strange that it halted the misguided struggle.

It was the face that Hugo's crew had seen! Unearthly in its glow, the ghostly visage sidled across the room a few feet from the floor, toward the outer door!

While others gaped, Norgil flung himself for the weird object. There was a yell, a rapid brawl, during which the ghostly face twitched frantically, and at moments disappeared. Stacks of money and bonds were bounding about the floor as two grapplers stumbled across the box toward the inner wall of the room.

For a moment, the witnesses saw the ghost's face vividly outlined against the blackness of the floorless closet. Then it plunged deeper. There was a scuffly sound as one fighter tugged himself away; a scream, as another lost his balance.

The ghost was gone amid a trailing wail that came from the pit, a sound that was ended by a solid crush when a human frame met concrete. Close by the closet door, the sheriff poked his head over the edge and gave a loud gulp.

Below, at the bottom of the pit, he saw that ghostly face shining up at him!

A VOICE spoke from the sheriff's elbow. It was Norgil's tone, a bit gaspy from the fray, but otherwise calm. The magician turned a flashlight down into the pit and clicked the switch. The ghost's face vanished; instead, the sheriff saw the crumpled figure of Hugo Clendon, lying face-downward on the cellar floor.

"Luminous paint," explained Norgil. "Miriam painted the face on the back of Hugo's coat when he left it in my sitting room. It only shows up in darkness.

"That's why Hugo's men deserted him. Every time he moved ahead of them, they saw the face. But he couldn't see it, so he kept along his way. He was alone, as I wanted him to be, when he met the thing that he thought was his uncle's ghost."

More flashlights blinked. Gathering the scattered bundles of old Roger Clendon's wealth, Norgil and his companions left the queer old house, wherein the murderer, Hugo Clendon, had found death as his final heriage.

"THE SILVER VENUS", another Norgil story; "NO TIME TO FOOL", a new Carrie Cashin yarn; "CAMERA KILL", a rackets man story; "BLOOD ARROW", an Angel of Death novelette; "MONKEY MAN", by Mark Harper, and other smashing hit stories in the next issue of CRIME BUSTERS. Be sure to get your copy, and tell your friends about it. Only 10 cents.

A girl, Big Red Brennan and Honolulu. Codes for sale, sabotage, wars started for a price. Anything can happen in

HULU TOWN

By Steve Fisher

CHAPTER I.

FLEET ARRIVAL.

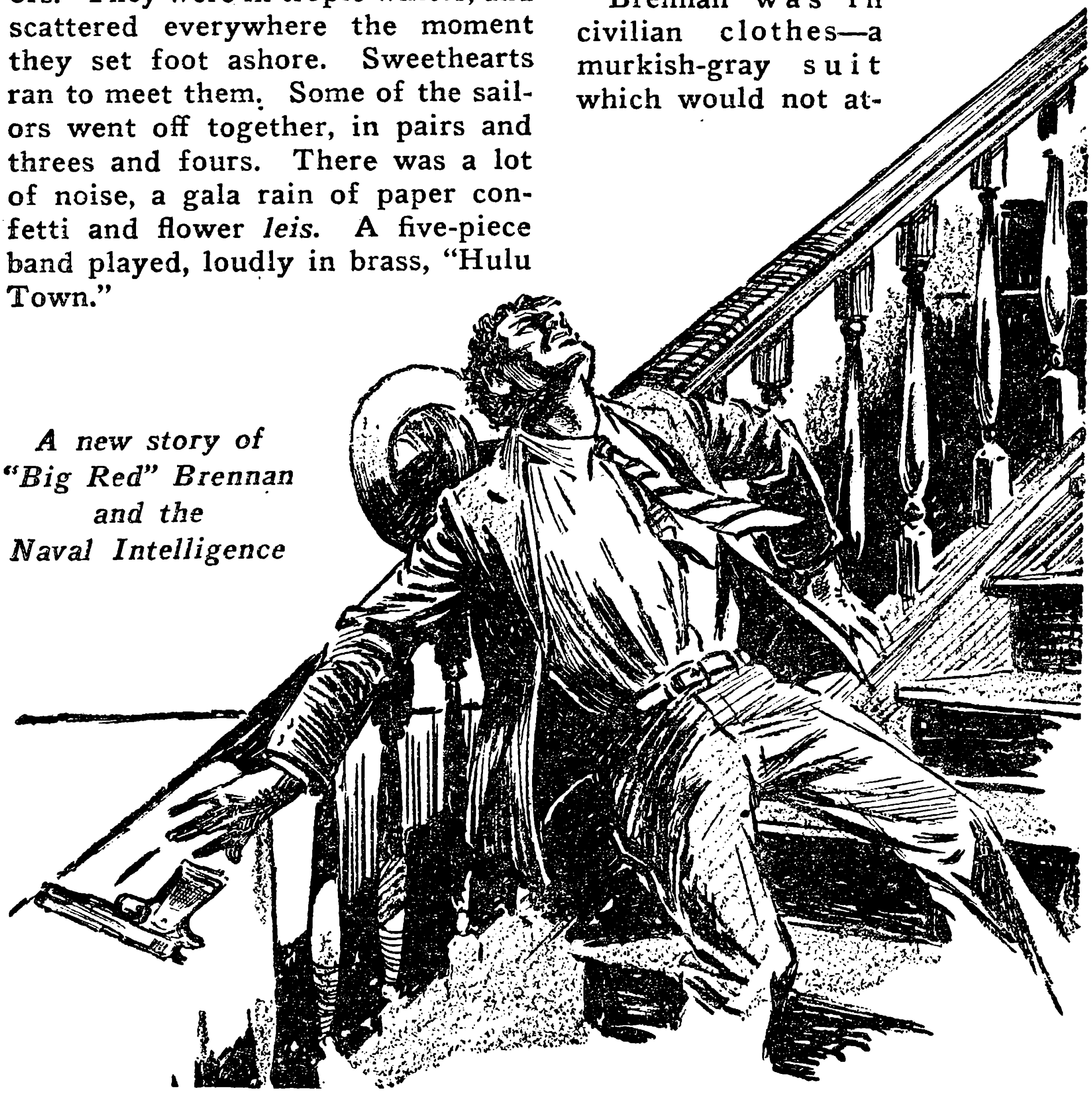
BRENNAN watched. The motor launch hauled in alongside the dock and disembarked a boat load of sailors. They were in tropic whites, and scattered everywhere the moment they set foot ashore. Sweethearts ran to meet them. Some of the sailors went off together, in pairs and threes and fours. There was a lot of noise, a gala rain of paper confetti and flower *leis.* A five-piece band played, loudly in brass, "Hulu Town."

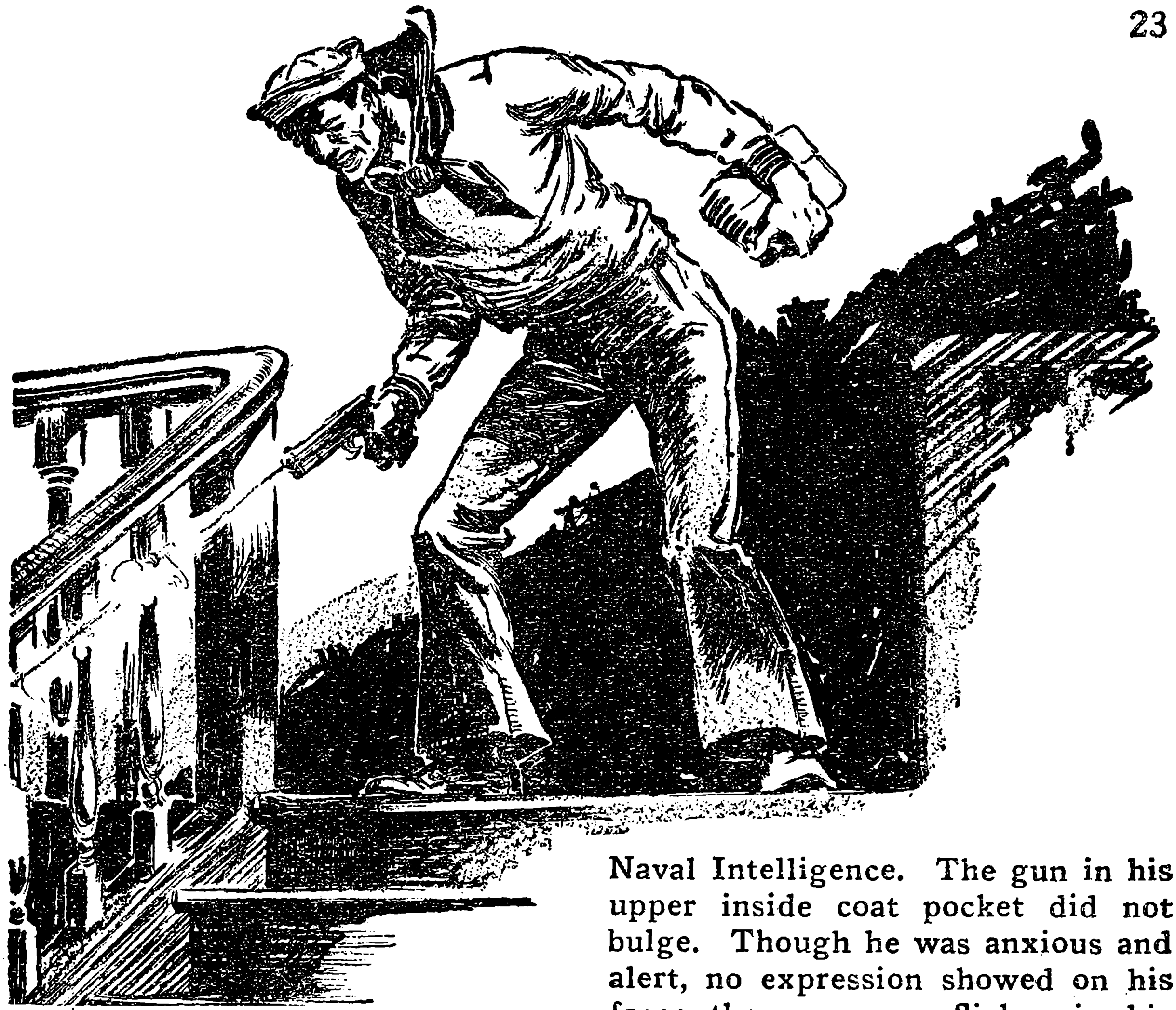
Another motor launch full of sailors was coming in across the channel. In the distance behind it, battleships lay at anchor. The fleet had just come in.

Brennan kept watching.

Brennan was in civilian clothes—a murkish-gray suit which would not at-

A new story of
"Big Red" Brennan
and the
Naval Intelligence





tract attention. He wore a white Panama straw hat, and white shoes. He looked like an islander. His face was bronze and hard, with jutting cheek bones and slate-gray eyes. His lips were thick. He put a cigarette between them now and lit it.

The smoke drifted up past his face, past the deep red of his sideburns; this deep red was also the color of his short-clipped hair, which the straw hat now covered. He was broad-shouldered, with a thick, heavy body, all muscle. But he looked inconspicuous here. There were so many other things, so many other people to see, the sailors scarcely glanced toward him.

No casual look would have betrayed—except to those who knew him well—that he was "Big Red" Brennan, of almost international fame as an ace of the United States Naval Intelligence. The gun in his upper inside coat pocket did not bulge. Though he was anxious and alert, no expression showed on his face; there was no flicker in his gray eyes. Big Red just watched.

Miraculously, he saw each man who climbed from the incoming motor launches. When he breathed, he felt his gun pressing against his chest. He had an idea he would presently have to use it.

Methodically, almost casually, he suddenly left his vantage spot. He mingled in among the sailors. He walked as though he drifted aimlessly. But his eyes were on one man and did not leave him.

This was a tall, thin-faced sailor who had a yeoman's rating on his arm. The gob was pale and his eyes were set back in his head, the lids red-rimmed, the pupils bright, too bright, the whites shot with a telltale haze of pink. The man was in a nervous condition. He lit a cigarette with trembling fingers. His eyes looked all around.

He carried a package under his skinny arm. It was a bundle, square, fairly small, done up in brown paper. Brennan knew that the man's name was Highler. He knew Highler, had seen pictures of him, had observed him before—although Highler had never seen nor heard of Brennan.

Highler's ship had arrived in Honolulu a week before the others, so that this was not Highler's first trip ashore. He started off the dock. Brennan bumped into him.

"Sorry," said Brennan.

"Watch to hell where you're going," Highler said nervously. He was surrounded by sailors, and talking to a civilian like this he felt quite safe.

Brennan had dropped his cigarette and put a fresh, unlighted one in his mouth. "I certainly will," he replied.

"Certainly will what?" Highler rasped.

"Watch where I'm going." Brennan smiled thinly. He caught Highler by the arm as the sailor started off again. "Got a light?"

"Go to hell," Highler said, and jerked away.

BRENNAN watched him weave through the crowd, then he shrugged. He started after him. He followed casually enough, threading through the mob. The unlighted cigarette still hung in his mouth, but there was a hard ebony glow in Brennan's eyes, so that they were gray-black now.

He had stopped Highler momentarily to make absolutey sure of his identity. He had done this also so that Highler would recognize him the next time he saw him. That would be soon.

Highler walked up the street past the police station, which is near the dock; he glanced at it in passing. Big Red did, also. He was several yards behind Highler, and there were any number of sailors on the sidewalk in between them.

Highler walked right through town, waving away big Kanaka-driven sedans which had "Taxi" pasted up on the windshield. He knew his Honolulu; he knew the streets and directions. And it was obvious that he was afraid of taxis, afraid of a trap of some kind. He had a lanky stride and progressed rapidly.

Big Red walked along, following him. He passed dry-goods stores with Chinese strips hanging in the windows; grocery stores which featured barrels of poi that stood out on the sidewalk—and reeked. Big fat Kanaka cops, garbed in khaki and jungle hats, sat in canvas booths at every street intersection, fanning their portly faces and directing traffic when the thought occurred *to them, which was at infrequent in*tervals.

The loud-speaker of a phonograph store blared out at Brennan. Besides the countless sailors, the people he passed consisted of Japanese, Koreans, Portuguese, Filipinos and now and again a Hawaiian, though these seemed in the minority. The Hawaiians, Brennan thought, had all gone to Hollywood.

He followed Highler for forty minutes.

BY this time, they were in the dowdier section of the city. Highler crossed Aala Park and headed in toward Hell's Half Acre. They had crossed the sewer-river which is River Street. Highler walked along the little alley street of the Acre, wooden frame tenements—roofed with tin—standing bleakly on each side of him.

Except for pimply-faced little men loitering in doorways, the alley was deserted. It was now that Highler glanced over his shoulder. When he saw Brennan, he drew up short. Then, just as suddenly, he broke into a mad sprint.

Big Red followed. Highler dashed into a tenement doorway, bowling over a Portuguese who first squealed and then began swearing. Brennan lunged in then, upsetting the Portuguese again, tramping over him to get up the wooden stairs after Highler. Highler, panting, reached the second floor; then, he turned, jerked a gun out of his waist and aimed it down at Brennan.

The Portuguese downstairs was still swearing.

Big Red, caught short, dipped his hand toward his own automatic. He was ten steps from the top, and Highler was directly above him. Brennan's gun was only halfway out when Highler opened fire.

The first two shots missed, and the Portuguese downstairs screamed and began to run. The third shot—just as Brennan had his gun in position—caught Big Red in the side. The impact of the bullet jerked him around as though he were a puppet.

He lurched, caught onto the banister. His gun dropped from his hands. He groped after it, felt blood seeping down his side. He faltered, stumbled. Highler's gun began screaming at him again. Blackness shot up through Big Red's mind like the gusher of an oil well. The roar of gunfire crashed against his ears.

CHAPTER II.

THE WEAKEST LINK.

WHEN he realized he was fumbling, Big Red Brennan had the instinctive intelligence to get the devil away from the roaring gun, and he deliberately threw his body backward. It didn't take much. A jerk, quivering of his muscles, and he was tumbling down the stairs, thudding to the floor below.

Highler's shots crashed on either side of him, and Brennan lay there grimly, consciousness and strength returning to him, counting the shots.

When he counted the seventh, he pulled himself to his feet. Highler was fumbling with a new clip of bullets. Big Red, his eyes burning, sweat dripping down his high-cheekboned face, thick lips set tight, grabbed the banister and swung upward. He picked his automatic up off the stairs.

Highler saw it, jerked to get the clip into his own gun, saw suddenly that he wasn't going to have time. He screamed shrilly, dropped the weapon and began to run.

Big Red could have shot him then. But he didn't. He didn't play the game that way, even when death was the pay-off. Highler was unarmed.

Highler raced for the third-floor stairs. A woman stuck her head out of her room door and screamed. She was a Filipino. This was a third-floor room and Highler dashed into it.

Brennan was close behind him, shoving his automatic into his side pocket. Highler raced across the Filipino woman's room, dropping his paper-bound package. He reached the window, crashed through it.

When Brennan got there, Highler was hanging by his hands, his bleeding hands, and looking down, wondering if he could jump. It was one and a half stories. There was a shed below. Big Red reached for Highler just as he let go.

There was a splintering of wood. The shed was not topped with tin, and the wooden roof was rotten. Highler went through it like a bolt. Big Red paused only a moment, took a bead on the hole Highler had made, and leaped.

His ankles stung, even though he knew how to take a fall and he had broken his descent by scraping his elbows through the hole that Highler had made in the shed. He landed right on top of Highler, who hadn't gotten up.

Highler, weak, bleeding now, squirmed beneath him. Then, lips drawn and thin, he brought his knee up into Red's stomach. He beat out with his fists.

Brennan took the punishment; then, his teeth set, he grabbed Highler's arms and, jerking out handcuffs, linked the wrists together. Brennan, breathing hard, climbed off. He let Highler get to his feet the best he could. The lanky sailor was a sorry sight—bloody, dirty, the fear of hell in his sullen eyes.

"I'M not important," Highler whined. "Why do you have to pick on me?"

"We like weaklings," said Big Red. "You're part of a spy chain—the weakest link. The only link on which we have any absolute evidence. Such as that package you dropped in the Filipino woman's room."

"But *why*——"

"Because you're going to talk," said Brennan smoothly. "Weaklings talk. We have ways——" He smiled thinly, holding the wound in his side. The ache was dull and discomforting; he had little time for words.

"You're going to tell us all about the rest of the chain," he went on. "You don't know it. You'll even deny it—but you're going to railroad the whole gang. Cops in the cities use stool pigeons. Intelligence men in spy cases use cowards—they sing such a pretty song when they get in a sweat box!"

"You're crazy if you think *I'd* talk," Highler said, but the light in his eyes betrayed him. If he could get his sentence shortened; if they only wouldn't hurt him—*if*—*if*——

A police whistle sounded in the alley outside.

Big Red opened the door. Two Kanaka cops rushed in, guns in hand, followed by the Portuguese who had been knocked over in the doorway. The little man was gesticulating wildly and shouting in a foreign tongue. Now and then he managed to get in a word of English, but it was profane.

"What go on here, eh?" asked the first cop.

"Plenty," said Brennan. He flashed his Naval Intelligence credentials, then glanced toward Highler. "Take him down and lock him up. Later, the sergeant and some of the boys are going to sweat him for me. He's got information on a spy ring that's been working frantically in Honolulu, ever since the fleet arrived."

"Sure," said the Kanakas. They caught Highler by the arms.

"You know what it means, of course," Brennan went on, and his voice was cold and hard. "The fleet's over here in Hawaii, and six months ago these maneuvers weren't scheduled at all. With the trouble we have in China, *anything* can happen, and might. The navy's a powder keg.

"Spy rings bent on sabotage, on learning military codes, willing to go to any extreme to get information against, or to cripple the United States, are everywhere among us. And we've got to smash them, if we're to preserve peace, if we're to keep our fighting navy—which is a bulwark of peace—in shape to *fight*. Not to be made fools of, we've got to smash every single rotten ring in Honolulu.

"Getting Highler here is the first step. We knew he was a spy working for a ring here. But that's all we know about it. If we can make him talk—*and we will*—we can wipe out the whole gang with which he has been involved. This isn't like peace time. We're sitting on dynamite that's liable to go up any minute!"

THE Kanakas were gaping at him. Big Red wiped sweat from his face. He didn't know how all that had come out of him. He smiled grimly. When you worked every hour of the night and day for months on end, fighting the enemies of your country, the enemies of peace, international spies who sold out your navy's secrets, you couldn't help getting worked up about it.

He went through hell and fed on it. There was always trouble these days. It was everywhere about him, cropping up like a death's head no matter where he looked. He had to keep working, to keep fighting; he knew that.

"Take Highler on down to headquarters," he said, and walked out of the shed.

The first and most important thing he had to do was to go back up to the Filipino woman's room where Highler had dropped the package. That package contained navy code books which Highler had been regularly stealing off his ship (in capacity of office yeoman it had been simple for him to learn the combination of the flag officer's safe, and to open it and get the books).

Big Red had to get these books before they got into enemy hands, before they got into the hands of men who would sell them to another country.

When suspicion had first been directed against Highler, Brennan had ordered "hands off," so that he could catch him red-handed. He knew that the work of a spy had weakened Highler, had made him nervous, jittery; that it should be a simple task to break him down, to squeal on the rest of the gang, and to appear against them in a court trial. The plan was beginning to take on a successful aspect.

He walked through the alley, and then into the building where he had chased Highler. He swung up the steps, his hand still clamped over the bullet wound in his side. The Filipino woman's room door was open. Big Red walked in.

The room was empty. He looked everywhere for the woman and could not find her.

The package Highler had dropped was gone!

CHAPTER III.

A PRETTY GIRL.

BRENNAN stood there, holding his hand to his hip, putting a cigarette between his thick lips with the other hand; but he forgot to light the cigarette, and he kept looking around. The window was broken. The room was a shambles.

He realized, of course, that the tables had been turned on him.

This tenement, into which Highler had run, had not been one which chance had suddenly afforded him. Highler had chosen this building deliberately. The woman's scream had been both fright and a ruse. It was with the Filipino woman, obviously, that Highler had the appointment to deliver the package. She would take it to someone else. The endless, subtle chain of espionage, one hand to another.

So when he had ceased clutching it so tightly and had dropped the package in the room, Highler had done it because he must have known Big Red would inevitably catch him; he had done it so that the woman could pick the package up and flee.

They'd had Brennan going and coming.

The worst thing this could mean was that Highler *would know* that there was no longer any absolute evidence against him. The spies would get this message to him, somehow. There would be verbal evidence from men aboard the ship who had originally suspected him, but there would be no evidence strong enough for a conviction.

So there would be no point in his "talking." He would have nothing to gain except to escape physical police punishment, and even this, in the new light without evidence, could not legally be done.

They could hold Highler indefinitely on suspicion, but having no real corpus delecti to hold over his head, so that he would involve the rest of the gang, they could not be as rough with him as they ordinarily would. Lawyers and the newspapers would interfere.

Highler could laugh at them. He could laugh at the police and at justice.

Big Red knew there would be no use searching the tenement. The Filipino woman would have departed with the codes long ago. It was entirely likely that she would never return. This had been a mere temporary rendezvous, like hundreds of others—a room rented for this one occasion.

He stomped out, glum, defeated, still holding the wound in his side.

HE caught a taxi back to his hotel and called in the house physician to patch the bullet wound. It was a hip scratch, but from the pain it gave him he thought it not impossible for poison to have set in. He didn't want that.

He was sitting there, his gray coat and trousers thrown over a chair, wearing only his robe, and watching the doctor work on him, when a new idea came. Perhaps the spies wouldn't be able to get word to Highler at once about the disposition of the package. Brennan could go down to headquarters, say that the Filipino woman had escaped, but that they had managed to get the books from her. If Highler accepted that story, it would be a simple matter to get him to talk.

Brennan grabbed the phone. He wasn't well known at headquarters, although they knew that there were several Intelligence men in town, and the police had been instructed to work with them.

"This is Brennan, Naval Intelligence," he said. "I'm coming down to see my prisoner—this guy Highler. Meanwhile, don't let *anyone* near him. No visitors. Get it?"

"Yes, sir."

He hung up. The doctor finished. "I think that will do if you take it easy," he said.

Big Red Brennan's bronze face broke into a smile, but he said only: "Okay, doc, thanks." When the physician had gone, Red got up and poured himself a drink. Then, because it was hot, and the afternoon fray had made him filthy, he took a shower. He was careful not to get his hip bandage too wet.

It was while he was in the shower that the knock sounded on the door.

Red yelled: "Okay. Wait a minute." He dried, climbed into pajama pants, put on his robe and wrapped it about him, and went to the door.

A PRETTY girl stood there. She was dressed in cool white linen which looked as though it might be the slightest bit transparent. She was built well, with adequate hips and large breasts. Her face was very white, very strained, but withal, was beautiful. Glistening red lips, dark eyes, soft mahogany-colored hair which was curled up at the ends. The hair rested just above her shoulders.

"You're Mr. Brennan?" she said.

"Yes."

"May I come in?" Her voice caught. "I have to talk to you."

Big Red pulled his robe tighter and flung the door open wide. She stepped in, walking past him.

He closed the door, putting the sole of his slippered foot back up against the panel. He folded his arms on his chest. He was waiting for her to talk.

She seemed to look at the carpet for a minute; then, she brushed a hand over her face and looked up at him. "It's about my—my brother," she said. "I understand he's in trouble. The police say that you ordered his arrest."

"Your brother?"

"Albert Highler. The sailor you—you——"

"Yes, I know," said Brennan.

She bit her lip. "Mr. Brennan, he—Albert didn't mean to get in trouble. He was dragged into this thing. It wasn't his fault. He told me about it only two days ago. He's been worried and sick. The spy ring *made* him work for them. He——"

Brennan shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said, "I'm honestly sorry."

SHE sank down in the divan, sobbing suddenly. She was on the verge of hysteria. Big Red moved across the room, turned a chair around backwards, and sat down on it, his arms resting over the back of it, his chin on the back of his hands. She looked like a nice girl. He wanted to comfort her. But he didn't know what to say. Finally:

"What's your name?"

"Dorothy. I——" She daubed at her eyes. "Would you—you fix me a drink or something? I'm not very strong. I've been through *so* much. I've really got something to tell you. The spies tried to contact me once and—well, I learned something. I thought if it would do any good—I mean, if it would help my brother for me to tell you something that would be any good——"

Brennan kicked the chair aside and got up. "Sure," he said. There was something about her that excited his sympathy. With a brother like Highler, he could imagine what she had been through. He went into the kitchen of his hotel suite and mixed a highball for her. He made it strong, brought it in with ice tinkling. She put her handkerchief in her purse, took the drink and sipped on it. When she looked up, appreciation shone in her dark eyes.

She was presently talking in a normal pitch of voice.

"I DIDN'T see all the members of the ring. Only one—a man. He tried to sell me on the idea of working for him. He said my brother did, that there was little risk, and big pay. When I refused, he tried to use my brother as leverage to

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force me to join them. I still live in dread that they will find me again. But I was able to gather this much: This particular ring is working solely on the navy. The extent of their work is far-flung. The theft of documents, codes, maneuvers, charts, plans, and actual missions of sabotage are directed by them.

"They consist of sailors in the navy who have been bribed, three white men, one Hawaiian, four Portuguese and several women—some of them Chinese and Japs, and one Filipino.

"They have no national race or creed. They are out on their own, selling the documents they get to the foreign power that bids the highest, and committing sabotage on the same basis. They are international. So they are worse than spies from a foreign country. They'd cut *anybody's* throat for a palmful of gold. It doesn't matter whose flag they fly."

"Yes, I know," said Brennan. "I knew just about that much about them."

She sipped her drink. "I—I guess I haven't been much help then. But I thought if I could do something, *anything* to help Albert out—— Well, the last thing I discovered, is that one of their shacks is located near the Pali. They are meeting there tonight, to discuss something. I was supposed to join them, but of course I won't. I'm going to hide until—until they're wiped out."

Big Red nodded. "A good idea. I'll locate this shack myself. You've been a lot of help. Maybe"—he paused—"maybe we can make it easier on Highler."

Dorothy rose. "That would be ——" She bit her lip again, and he saw that she was about to cry. Rather than face him crying, she turned and hurried out.

Brennan stood there a moment, recovering his senses after seeing her beauty. Then he suddenly realized he should have told her where she could be safe.

He picked up the house phone and called the desk downstairs.

But she was already gone.

He had to do something, he thought; he *had* to do something. He kept hold of the phone.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SLIT TONGUE.

BIG RED didn't go to headquarters to see Highler.

He somehow had no immediate ambition to third degree the sailor since he had talked to his sister. There were other ways. Her tip to the place of the Pali was significant. He could at least go up and check on it. If it didn't turn out to be anything, he could go to the police station then and try making Highler talk.

He paced his room, turning these thoughts over in his mind——

It was about half an hour later when he finally got dressed. He put on the same gray suit, the same white Panama hat, put his gun in his inside coat pocket and left the hotel.

He borrowed the roadster owned by the hotel detective. It was some little drive to the Pali, and Brennan didn't want a taxi.

He sat at the wheel, an unlighted cigarette hanging in the corner of his mouth, his hard, high-cheekboned face pale in the light of the moon. The car rolled swiftly over the black ribbon of road. Red wound up hills, past coco palms, ginger flowers, a spider web of *hala* vines that seemed to cover the side of a hill. The air was sweet and dry, and warm.

Big Red worked alone whenever

it was possible. He worked alone now, because he knew there was scarcely anyone you could trust on spy cases. The bribe money was tremendous. He rode through the night alive with Hawaiian landscape, and a chill went through him, as though in the altitude of the Pali the air was colder.

But it wasn't that. It was a hunch, and the secret fear of the unknown—of death—that lingers in the heart of every man of action.

The Pali is unpopulated, so that after he had reached it, and climbed out of the car to wander through the forest of trees around it, he was not long in finding the trail that led to the shack Dorothy Highler had described to him.

It was a small, squat, one-room hut. There was no clearing. Trees grew almost at its side. It couldn't have taken more than a few hours to construct it. There were no lights; just the moon slanting through the tree branches across the thatched roof.

"Grass shack," Brennan whispered, and moved forward.

He turned on a flashlight, walked in through the opening, which was doorless. He turned the light around the small room.

The lanky sailor, Highler, was sitting there. He was sitting in the middle of the floor, propped up by a tree trunk. His mouth was open and blood had run down the sides of it. But the blood was drying. His eyes were open, but they were like marble. His face was ghastly.

He had been dead for several minutes.

BIG RED BRENNAN began to sweat. He stooped and felt the corpse, as though he couldn't quite believe this: Highler, who should have been in jail; Highler, whom the police had assured Brennan was in his cell just a few hours ago. This was the shack in which the spies were to meet and discuss things. This was——

Big Red rose. He stood alone there in the darkness. He saw what it was now. Quickly, his hands went into his pockets. He searched the back pockets, the coat pockets, the vest pockets. His credentials, his badge, his Naval Intelligence papers—all were gone!

A Fed without his credentials is liable for suspension.

For a moment he stood and could not move. He knew what a fool he had been. The girl had been a plant. It was her appearance, her acting, her manner, that had fooled him. Women fooled him easier than men. While he was out in the kitchen fixing her the drink she had said she needed, *she* had been going through his pockets, getting the credentials.

His gray trousers and coat had been lying in a chair not two feet from her! She must have sized up the situation and acted at once. She had probably come prepared to pick his pocket and found an easier way!

They didn't know Brennan well at the police station; and after Dorothy had turned the papers over to one of the spies, the spy had gone down, posed as Brennan, flashed the badge and ordered Highler's release. They had wanted him out so he wouldn't talk.

Even with no evidence against him, Highler had been weak, nervous; he had been cracking, and they *had* to get him out of the way. So they had killed Highler and brought him here.

Dorothy had directed Brennan here so he could see Highler.

It was defiance. They were thumbing their noses at him. They were laughing at him. Brennan had no other leads, and they were only too well aware of that fact. Highler had been the beginning and end of his hope.

It was a clever and dangerous spy ring. It wasn't likely he'd find another weak link in the chain. They had done away with Highler—the weak link—and there would be no more.

They were operating in defiance of Brennan, challenging him to detect their subtle methods of bribery and intrigue. It had taken Brennan weeks to find the weak link which was Highler. It might take him months to get another break equally as good.

And in that time, the damage the gang could do would be enough to almost cripple the inner defense of the navy. Codes for sale. Sabotage for hire. Wars started—for a price!

Big Red Brennan turned his flashlight down and stared again at Highler's corpse.

Then hope flickered in him. He remembered something. He turned and raced out of the shack.

HONOLULU—Hulu Town—was ablaze. Sailors were everywhere. The moment Brennan arrived back in the little island metropolis, he telephoned the naval shore station. He went to the railroad station, waited impatiently.

The train from Pearl Harbor rolled in and twelve white-clad sailors climbed out. They were dressed differently from the sailors who were running around Hulu Town having a good time, in that these men wore leggings and brown straps about their waists, and carried automatic holsters. Their white hats were squared on the front of their heads. They were grim.

It didn't matter any more that Highler had been killed, his tongue first slit so that he would never talk again.

Brennan commandeered three taxi-sedans. The sailors climbed in. Brennan stood on the running board of the first car and gave directions. His hat blew off. Breeze raced through his short-clipped red hair. His gray eyes had the light of hell in them.

They pulled up in front of a big brown house in the Kalehi district. The house had three floors. Lights were on in every room. The sailors climbed out of the cars. Brennan led them across the yard. He banged at the door, then broke it in.

The first person he saw was Dorothy. She screamed out a warning. The second person he saw was the Filipino woman. Then both Dorothy and the other woman were swept aside in the scramble. Two white men appeared, then a Hawaiian. The room was suddenly filled with men of various nationalities.

Hell broke loose.

THE men ducked back behind furniture, let go with blazing guns. The Hawaiian ran upstairs, Brennan at his heels. Members of the spy ring appeared from everywhere. The guns kept crashing out. The sailors were scattering around the house. They fought hand-to-hand battles, gun duels. A Chinaman swung from the stairway, landed between two sailors, bearing them down. A white man from behind a table was rigging a machine gun. A sailor rushed at him, but the gunner got the deadly weapon into action and cut the sailor down. The Tommy gun splattered bullets around the room.

Brrrrrrrrrt——

Two sailors lined up against the wall, crept toward the gunner. Another sailor kept his attention, hiding behind the living-room wall, firing at the gunner. The pair creeping toward the man made a dash for it. The machine gun turned toward them. But it never went off. They were on the gunner, lifting up the machine gun, crushing his skull with it.

Big Red Brennan rushed up the stairs behind the Hawaiian. Two sailors followed him. On the second floor, the Hawaiian raced into a room. Brennan was still following. But he ran right into a trap. The Hawaiian was crouched behind a thick leather chair, holding a gun on him. Two other men fired simultaneously from opposite corners of the room.

Only one shot got Big Red.

Brennan whirled around, fell forward. He landed hard, but almost at once he was crawling, moving toward the leather chair behind which the Hawaiian crouched. The Hawaiian's gun cracked at him.

The bullets splintered into the floor. Brennan, his side dripping blood, his face a mask of hatred, kept crawling forward; he paused now, lifted his own weapon. It burst with a fury of fire, but the bullets crashed into the leather of the chair. Brennan braced himself and forced his body forward. He was lunging in behind the chair toward the Hawaiian who was backing, leveling his gun.

The two sailors who had followed Brennan up the stairs arrived in the room in time to see the two men who had been in opposite corners, taking another bead on Brennan! Their guns screamed out, fire and hell. One of the men caught his stomach and pitched forward. He landed on the floor with a sickening crunch.

The other turned, stooped, and fired. A sailor, winged, whirled around, dropping his weapon. The other blazed fire simultaneously with the spy. But it was the sailor's aim which was more accurate. The spy crumpled, clawing almost blindly at the hole between his eyes.

While this was going on, Big Red Brennan was facing the Hawaiian, facing the gun of death pointed at his stomach. But when the gun went off, he was already on the Hawaiian, holding down his wrist, turning now.

Turning his own wrist back, Brennan kept hold of the Hawaiian's wrist, hurled the man over his shoulder. The Hawaiian went crashing to the floor. But almost at once he had straightened himself up. He was lifting his gun.

Brennan's shot got the Hawaiian's hand. The gun flew away from him. He shook the hand. It was a shaggy stump of gore. The Hawaiian kept looking at what was left of his gun hand; then, he screamed.

That was the last shot fired.

THE whole house was suddenly quiet. The entire capture had taken no more than minutes. It was one great swoop, seconds that were eternity, and a spy ring that would have wrecked the fleet, wiped out by a dozen sailors and one Intelligence ace.

It was a few minutes later that Big Red found his credentials and his badge on one of the white men downstairs. The man was dead. It was then, too, that he saw Dorothy, sweating, anxious to get out of the place. She was being lined up with the other women who had been captured, but not hurt in the gunfire.

He looked at her, clean and neat in her white linen dress, her lips overly emphasized with the red of her rouge, and he thought bitterly that if it wasn't for what he knew about her, he could have perhaps been fooled again. She must have been a successful spy agent while it lasted.

She smiled wanly at him. "It was a game, wasn't it?" she said. "Only you won. You were the first man I have been unable to convince of my sincerity."

He put a cigarette in his mouth but forgot to light it.

"You convinced me, all right," he said slowly. "Yes, you convinced me. So well that it has resulted in your capture. The capture of all of you. Because when you left the hotel, I was anxious about your welfare. First, I phoned downstairs to catch you going out, so I could find out where I could get in touch with you, so I could tell you where to hide—thinking, of course, that you did want to hide, thinking that you were innocent."

"Yes?" she asid.

BRENNAN shrugged. "Well, when I found out I'd missed you, I thought maybe you knew what you were doing, that you would find a safe place to hide; and not wanting to bother you, but still wanting to know where I could reach you again so that I could see how you were, so that I could talk to you—I detailed the hotel detective to follow you and see where you went.

"He simply quietly gumshoed you right back here to spy headquarters. Both he and I thought you were staying in this house. Staying here and hiding from the gang. I had him trail you out of my *sympathy* for you. That's what's ironic.

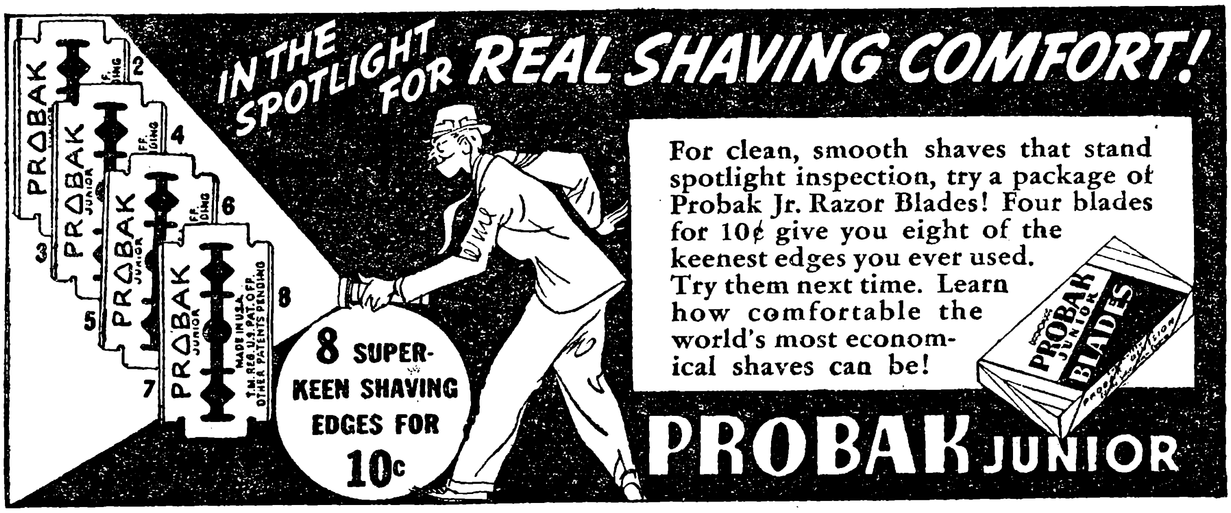
"Your innocence has tripped up the whole company. Your pretended innocence, I should say. Because the moment I found Highler and realized you had double-crossed me—realized you had been lying all the time—— Well, it wasn't hard to figure out the rest—that this was no hiding place; that it was actually the spy headquarters from which you had worked!"

"And a dumb hotel dick——"

"Yeah," said Big Red Brennan, "a dumb hotel dick, and my sympathy and interest in your well-being. Hurts, doesn't it?"

They led her out then, with the others, and he fumbled around with his hands. There was some little thing he was supposed to do, and hadn't done. In a moment he realized what it was. The cigarette in his mouth was still unlighted.

He lit it.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By Theodore Tinsley

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN IN UPPER SEVEN.

A DIM reading light illuminated the narrow Pullman berth where Carrie Cashin waited with tense watchfulness. She had removed her shoes and stockings, but otherwise she was fully dressed. There were flat bedroom slipers on her bare feet. A thin dressing gown covered the modish jacket and short skirt of her traveling costume.

The shade of the berth window had been lifted two or three inches from the bottom. Outside was the formless black blur of the racing countryside. Occasionally, lights flashed by and vanished like shooting stars.

But Carrie wasn't watching. Every atom of her will was concentrated on listening for the regular breathing of the man in Upper Seven. Carrie was directly under him in Lower Seven.

She was not there by chance. Nor did she expect to stay in this speeding midnight express until it arrived at Boston. She was depending on a combination of three things to help her escape from the train with a stolen object—her own cold nerve; the accuracy of her watch; and the coöperation of her faithful assistant, Aleck.

This wasn't the first time in her career as Manhattan's most efficient woman detective, that Carrie Cashin had deliberately planned a theft in the interests of an honest client. But the unusual nature of the loot brought a gleam of amused excitement into Carrie's brown eyes.

She was going to steal a Bible!

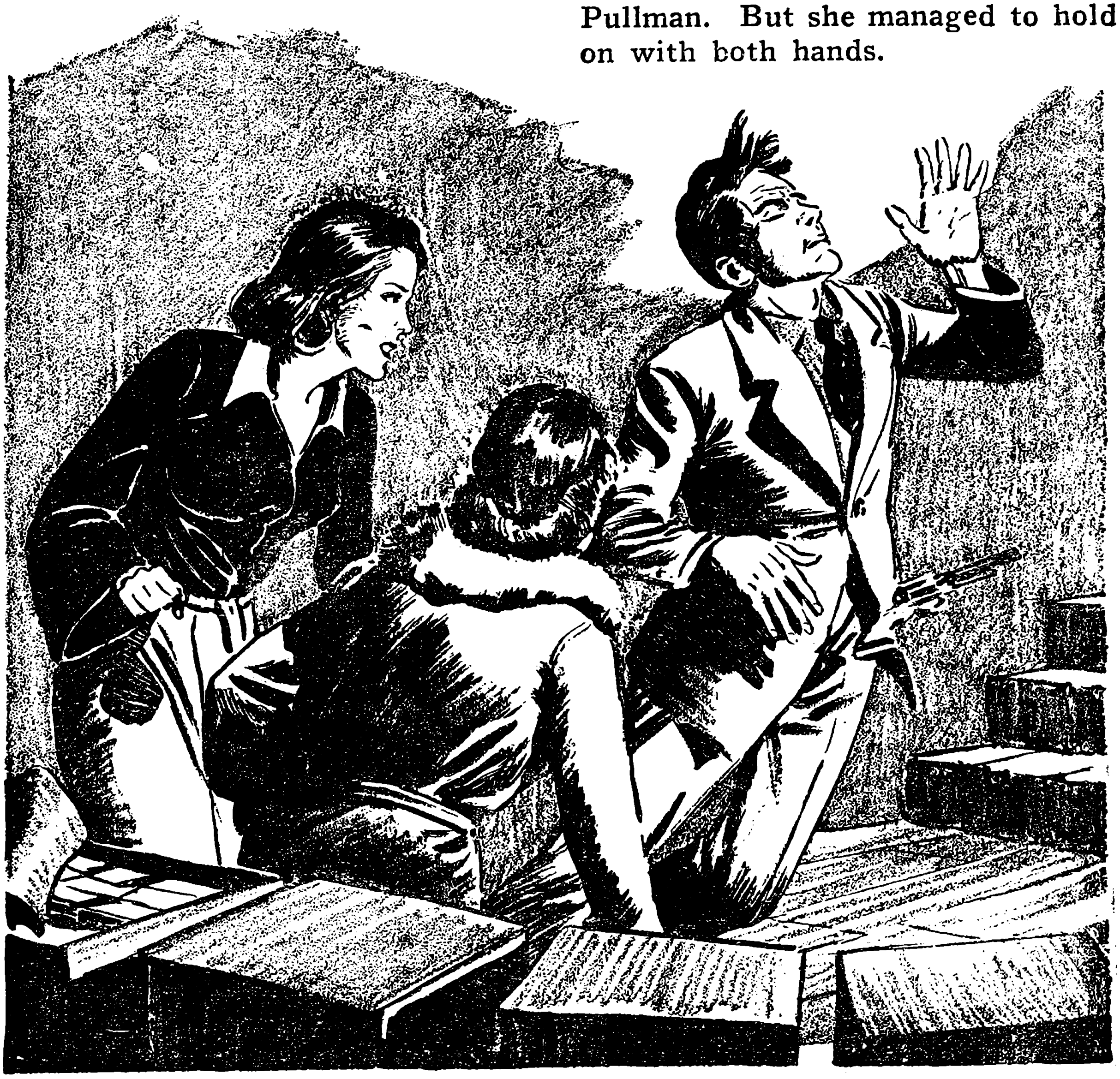
Suddenly, Carrie heard the sound for which she had been so grimly waiting. A rhythmic snore came from behind the drawn curtains of Upper Seven.

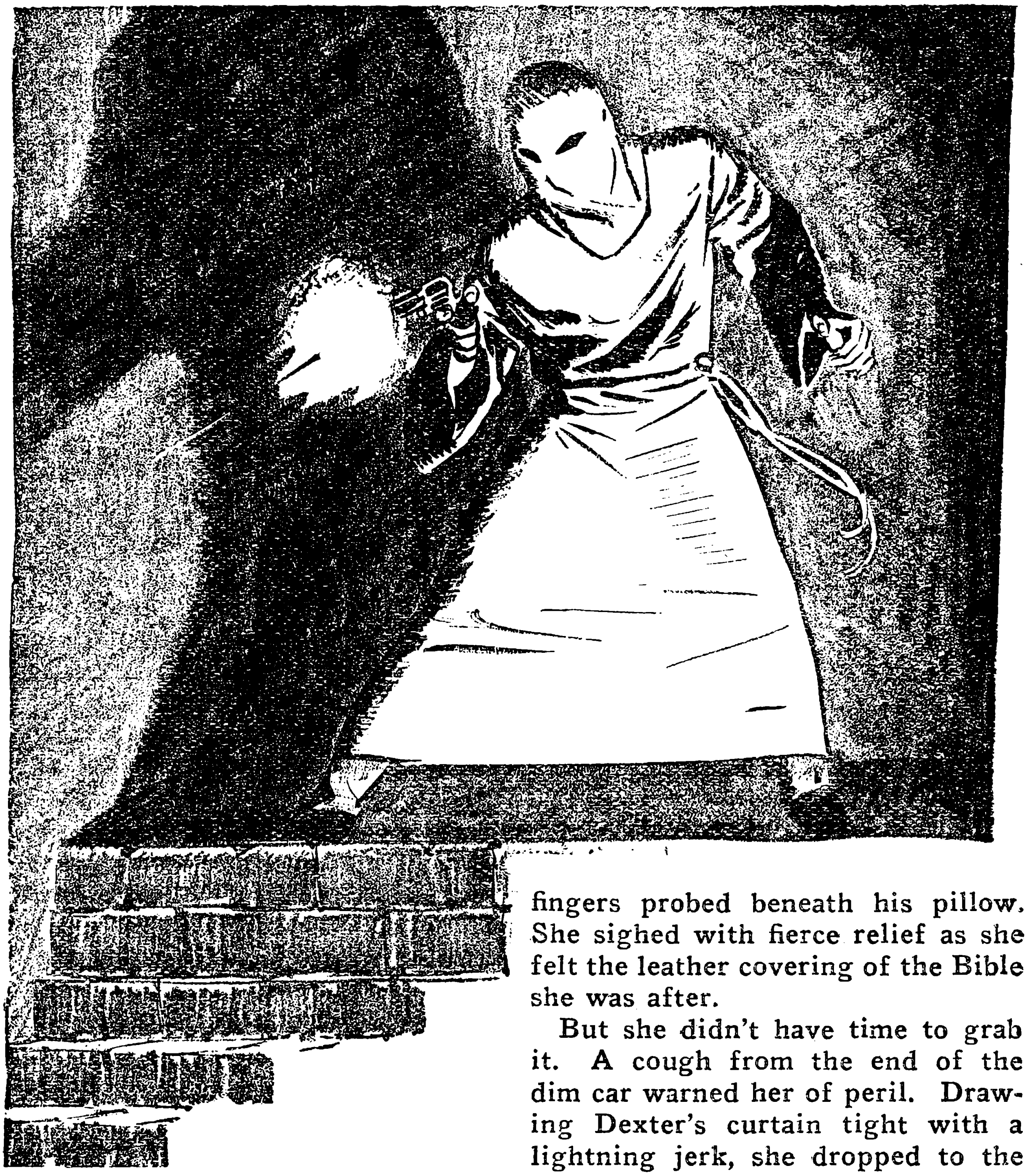
From a small leather traveling bag in her berth, Carrie removed a bottle of chloroform and a sponge. The sponge was in an oiled silk bag with a draw string. Laying them swiftly aside, she opened a yellowlacquered box that contained a complete manicuring set. She uncorked a bottle of nail polish. The bright-pink liquid smelled strongly of bananas. She spilled some of it on her finger tips and sprinkled the rest on the bedclothes of her berth.

The banana odor was quite strong. It deadened the reek of chloroform as Carrie quickly soaked the sponge and replaced it in the oiled silk packet. She left the draw string open. She was now ready to take care of the crooked Mr. Rodney Dexter.

Dexter was the man in Upper Seven. Carrie reached him by standing on the edge of her own berth and unfastening the green curtains above her. A quick glance up and down the dim aisle of the Pullman—and Carrie's lithe body jackknifed over the edge of the upper berth. Her right hand closed like a vise on the throat of the sleeping man. Her left jammed the chloroform-soaked sponge against his nose and mouth.

DEXTER woke instantly. He was stronger than Carrie; but the determined girl had counted on the strength of her own wrists and the deadening influence of the drug. Dexter's frightened breath filled his expanding lungs with chloroform. His wild heave nearly threw Carrie headlong to the dark aisle of the Pullman. But she managed to hold on with both hands.





The throttled victim was unable to utter a sound or to writhe away from the sponge in the open silk packet. The deadly drug spread like fog across his brain. His struggles got weaker and weaker. Carrie didn't relax her muscles until Dexter lay inert and unconscious.

Then she drew the draw string tightly shut on the packet that contained the reeking sponge. She rolled Dexter's head aside and her fingers probed beneath his pillow. She sighed with fierce relief as she felt the leather covering of the Bible she was after.

But she didn't have time to grab it. A cough from the end of the dim car warned her of peril. Drawing Dexter's curtain tight with a lightning jerk, she dropped to the Pullman floor. A Negro porter shambled into view. It was his barking, bronchial cough that had warned the girl. He was too late to observe what Carrie had done. But there was curiosity in his smoky eyeballs as he stared at the girl.

Carrie's back-flung hand shoved the silk packet under the edge of her coverlet. The porter was sniffing queerly. But he grinned as he saw the nail polish and got a whiff of the pungent banana smell.

"That stuff sho' is powerful strong, lady."

"Isn't it!" Carrie smiled. "I can't sleep, so I thought I'd sit up a while and polish my nails."

She was glad of her dressing robe and the flat slippers on her bare feet. It made her appearance in the aisle of the sleeping car seem perfectly normal. She hated to leave an important burglary job half completed, but there was nothing else she could do.

Carrie could feel the porter's stare riveted on her back as she walked toward the ladies' smoking room, at the rear end of the sleeper. She stepped inside, hoping to hurry back to Upper Seven as soon as the porter departed.

An attractive blonde in a lavender dressing gown was sitting cross-legged on the leather divan, smoking a cigarette. Carrie knew before the woman opened her wide, over-rouged mouth that she was a garrulous talker and dying for company.

Carrie accepted a cigarette reluctantly. She sat where she could watch the gap in the doorway curtain. She replied only in monosyllables to the talkative blonde. But the blonde didn't seem to mind. It was the hour of the night when talkative women like to get confidential.

Carrie pretended to listen. But her whole attention was nervously centered on the problem of a leather-covered Bible and a drugged thief named Dexter, behind the drawn curtain of Upper Seven.

CARRIE had been drawn into this adventure on rather quick notice. Her client was a young woman named Patricia Stone, granddaughter of an eccentric old millionaire who had died recently in Boston. When his will was opened, it was discovered that he had left no estate. His will declared that he had lost his huge fortune through unwise speculation. He had only two heirs—Patricia Stone, who was his favorite grandchild; and a grandson named Rodney Dexter, whom the old man hated. To Dexter, the old man had left nothing. To Patricia, he had left a leather-covered Bible.

That was the beginning of the mystery.

A week later, a letter came to New York for Patricia Stone. It was mailed by her grandfather's lawyer, according to instructions left in the will. Inside was a sheet of paper with a brief sentence written in her grandfather's neat, miserly handwriting:

> Weigh carefuly every word in this Bible and it will turn you to the truth.

Patricia dismissed the message lightly as the pious precept of a deeply religious man. But there were two things that puzzled her. One was the strange disappearance of her grandfather's wealth before he died. The other was the fact that the flap of the envelope that contained the message had obviously been tampered with. Someone had steamed it open and regummed it.

That afternoon, Patricia's maid, Anna, suddenly quit her job. She was so nervous that Patricia became suspicious and made her unlock her suitcase. The leather Bible was hidden inside. Anna protested it was an honest mistake in packing, and left hurriedly with an angry glint in her eye.

An hour later, the suave Rodney Dexter called. Patricia remembered afterward that the doorbell had rung twice while he was there, and both times she had left the room to answer it. When she finally got rid of Dexter, she hurried to the book-case. Her grandfather's Bible was gone!

She went straight to the Cash and Carry Detective Agency with her story. Dexter had incautiously told Patricia the name of the hotel where he was staying in New York—and that was all the lead Carrie Cashin needed.

She sent Aleck to watch Dexter's hotel. Aleck trailed the dead millionaire's grandson to Grand Central Station. He watched Dexter buy the Upper Seven berth on the midnight express to Boston. Aleck was smart enough to buy Lower Seven.

Carrie made up her mind instantly. She studied the timetable carefully. She sent Aleck and her client racing toward Boston in Carrie's own personal sedan, with peculiar instructions that were based on a time appointment, not a place.

CARRIE herself left Grand Central at midnight, aboard the Boston Limited. She was quietly certain that she had counted on everything. But she hadn't figured on the awkward intrusion of a Pullman porter, or the talkative zeal of a lonely blonde in the smoking compartment.

When Carrie finally slipped along the dim, curtained aisle toward her berth, she realized with a fast-beating heart that she had barely fifteen minutes left to steal the Bible if her scheme with Aleck was to work.

She locked everything inside her overnight bag and slipped on her stockings and shoes. Again she stood on the lower berth edge and jackknifed her body upward into Dexter's dark berth. She had barely done so when she heard the buzzing clamor of a bell.

One of the passengers was ringing for the porter!

Lying horizontally in darkness, with her back to a drugged crook, Carrie drew the green curtain shut with fingers that trembled in spite of her iron nerve. Her face and her bent knees were jammed dangerously close against the inside of the curtain. Hunched there insecurely, she prayed silently that the train wouldn't roar suddenly around a sharp curve!

In her desperate haste, she had no time to close her own curtain below. She heard the porter's feet stop. She knew he was staring in perplexity at the lighted emptiness of Lower Seven.

"Dat's funny," she heard him whisper. "Where dat fool woman go? She came out of de ladies' room, 'cause I see her do dat. She ain't left de car. An' Ah *knows* she ain't in her berth!"

His footsteps receded hurriedly. Carrie had an icy fear that he was going to summon the conductor. Then she forgot the porter as she became aware of something infinitely more horrible.

She felt a queer wetness soaking into the back of her dressing gown. Her hand slid backward over her shoulder toward the inert man behind her. She touched the warm stickiness of blood!

She turned over very slowly to face Dexter. Her hand fumbled for the tiny night bulb and she flicked it on for a brief instant. The sight she saw transfixed her with sick horror. Someone had slashed the drugged man's throat from ear to ear.

CHAPTER II.

RACE WITH A KILLER.

IT took courage, but Carrie forced herself to thrust her hand beneath the crimson-soaked pillow. Gritting her teeth, she told herself fiercely that she was a detective first and a woman afterward.

Her fingers touched the leather-covered Bible! Evidently, Dexter's murderer had been unable to complete his daring crime. Something had frightened him away before he could steal the book. Carrie could realize how that murderer must have felt as she lay, scarcely breathing, alongside the blood-smeared corpse in Upper Seven.

She parted the curtain and peered outward. One startled glance—and Carrie's tiny automatic pistol jerked from the pocket of her dressing gown. She was staring into the terrified face of the Pullman porter!

The suspicious Negro had tiptoed back along the shadowy aisle of the car. Carrie's gun choked off the cry in his wide-open mouth as he saw the dead man's throat and the girl's blood-stained, thin dressing gown.

"One yell out of you," Carrie whispered fiercely, "and I'll blow out the back of your skull!"

She dropped silently to the aisle. Except for the click of the wheels and the sway of the speeding train, the sleeping car was quiet. With her gun menacing the porter, Carrie used her free hand to slide the stolen Bible into her leather bag. Squirming out of her blood-smeared robe, she jammed it in with the Bible and locked the catch on her bag.

"Walk ahead of me!" she told the porter grimly. "Out to the vestibule."

She glanced at the radium dial of her wrist watch. Less than five minutes left in which to escape! Somewhere ahead in the onrushing darkness Aleck was waiting for Carrie in a parked sedan. The spot chosen was exactly midway between two stations which the train would roar past without stopping. It was a matter of exact timing, not of mileage.

CROUCHED menacingly in the blackness of the vestibule, Carrie forced the trembling porter to open the door and the metal shield that protected the doorway and the open steps. Her gun muzzle was as steady as a rock. She saw that the hands on her wrist watch were crawling dangerously close to the moment when she must leap.

"Take hold of that emergency cord! When I yell—jerk it hard!"

She was poised on the top step of the speeding train. Wind ripped at her like clawing fingers. The ground outside was inky black, invisible except for the pale glimmer of passing telegraph poles. Carrie tried to gauge the distance between those grim poles by their passing whir in the darkness. If her body should strike one——

Her eyes darted back to her wrist watch. Time to go! She gave a shrill yell and her gun emphasized it.

The porter jerked the cord.

The sudden jolt was terrific. The whole train seemed to shudder as if it had been struck head-on. Sparks shot out into the darkness from the tortured rails, as the train slid forward on locked wheels.

From the sleeping car came cries of excitement and terror. Frightened passengers were leaping from their berths. The Pullman conductor was racing up the aisle toward the dark vestibule.

Carrie fired at the groveling body of the Negro porter. Her bullet was aimed purposely high, so as not to harm him. He screamed and did exactly what she had anticipated. Staggering to his feet, he fled for his life into the sleeping car. He ran pell-mell into the onrushing conductor.

Carrie grabbed her leather bag and leaped from the still moving express.

The ground struck her with a prodigious impact. There was wrenching pain at her shoulder and knee, but she was able to stagger to her feet. She was standing at the brink of a steep earth embankment.

She threw her suitcase over the brow of the embankment and saw it bounce swiftly downward into pitch darkness. Fifty yards up the track, the red lights of the last car of the halted train were visible. Men were leaping to the roadbed. The engineer came racing back from the cab of the motionless locomotive.

CARRIE'S only safety was the fact that no one except a fear-jabbering porter knew exactly what had happened—or why. The darkness atop the railroad embankment cloaked Carrie's crouched body.

She threw herself down the steep slope. Her form followed the gouge marks in the soft earth where the traveling bag had bounced ahead of her. Carrie fell almost as limply as the suitcase had. She had sense enough to turn herself into a human ball. Her bent legs were clutched tightly by both hands. Her head was tucked under her lifted knees. She allowed herself to roll over and over, with no effort to check the frightful speed of her descent.

There was a road at the bottom, an unpaved country lane of the sort that usually parallels railroad embankments. Carrie's hurtling body bounced clear across the pitch-black road and brought up with a thump in a shallow drainage ditch on the other side.

Her suitcase lay upside down in the ditch, ten feet away. But there was no sign of Aleck's waiting sedan. The road was as black as the inside of a tomb. Had Aleck missed his directions in the darkness?

Carrie stared upward with a gasp of dismay. On the top of the railroad embankment, trainmen were swinging lanterns like yellow fireflies. The Negro porter was there, his finger pointing down the steep slope. The bright oval of an electric flashlight began to stab the darkness like a white, racing moon.

Then Carrie saw the signal she had hoped for. The swift, double glow of powerful automobile headlights! They were visible only for an instant, down the road. They faded to dense blackness. But it was all Carrie needed to lend power to her aching limbs.

Clutching her suitcase in one numb hand, she ran toward where Aleck had parked the car. He came rushing to meet her, but she flung off his efforts to help her.

"Quick! Back to your wheel! They're down in the road already! They'll find out our license number!"

But they didn't. Aleck reversed the darkened car as Carrie flung herself in the rear. He swung into a side lane. The powerful engine roared with the swift change to forward motion. Along that wooded lane the sedan sped, rocking from side to side as Aleck jammed down the accelerator with the sole of a big, steady foot.

Only his parking lights glowed ahead of the plunging car. But Aleck had been over every inch of this narrow dirt lane before nightfall. He knew that it led across country away from the railroad, joining ultimately with a smooth motor highway that ran almost in a straight line to Boston.

He uttered only one curt comment. "Did you get the Bible?"

"Yes!"

A CRY of relief came from a very pretty girl who sat alongside Carrie in the back of the sedan. This was Patricia Stone, the client from whom the Bible had been stolen by Rodney Dexter.

She clutched at the book and stared at the gold print of her grandfather's name on the cover. But, suddenly, the exultation faded from her eyes. Dismay made her lovely voice sound harsh.

"You've been tricked! You've got the wrong Bible! This isn't the book that Dexter stole from me!"

"What!"

Carrie stared sharply at the girl.

"It looks the same," Patricia said, "but it doesn't *feel* the same. It's too light in weight. The real Bible was heavier. And the covers were stiff, not soft like this one. They felt as though they were weighted with something."

Carrie's voice was grim with disgust.

"Why didn't you tell me that earlier?"

"I—I forgot. I was so excited over the theft, so anxious to get to Boston ahead of the thief——"

Aleck's face swerved for an instant from the wheel. "Do you think Dexter suspected something and switched books?" he asked.

"He couldn't," Carrie said dryly. "The man who cut Dexter's throat did that. Dexter was murdered!"

She explained tersely what had happened aboard the train. The sedan continued to race swiftly along the narrow cross-country lane, screened by dense underbrush on either side. Aleck switched on his bright lights. They had left the railroad far behind by this time.

"Have you any idea who killed Dexter?" Aleck asked.

"No. I wish I did. I'm on the spot for murder, unless I can find out." Carrie turned to the frightened Patricia. "Did anybody except us know about your loss? I mean, anyone in New York?"

"Only Richard," the girl said faintly. "Richard Sharpley. He's my—my fiancé. Surely you don't suspect him of any——"

"Did he ask to go to Boston with you?"

"No. I told him I had hired a detective. He agreed there was nothing he could do to help."

"Hmmm," Aleck said. "And he's your fiancé?" There was skepticism in Aleck's murmur, but he said no more.

A broad opening gleamed suddenly ahead among the trees. The sedan curved swiftly onto the concrete ribbon of the State motor highway.

"How far are we from Boston?" Carrie asked.

"Forty-five miles," Aleck said.

"We can't beat the train. The killer will get there before we do. The city streets will slow us up. All he'll have to do is to grab a taxicab at the station."

She swung tensely toward Patricia Stone.

"Where did your grandfather live? In the city or beyond it?"

"In—the suburbs," the girl gasped. "The house stands on an isolated road this side of Boston. It's a huge old place, with grounds and gardens and a brook. If we hurry——"

Aleck's foot pressed harder on the accelerator. The needle of the speedometer began to climb dangerously high on the dashboard dial.

The sedan shuddered as added power sent it hurtling along the deserted highway under the pale glimmer of a starlit sky.

CHAPTER III.

SUNLIGHT CLUE.

DAWN was beginning to streak the blackness overhead with pale silver when Aleck halted the sedan outside the secluded country estate of Patricia Stone's dead grandfather. The house looked gaunt and empty. Weeds were beginning to grow thickly in the flower beds. The shrubbery looked neglected and overgrown.

There were fresh tire marks of an automobile in the driveway, but no sign of the car that had left them. Aleck led the way toward the house.

It was Aleck who saw the open window on the ground floor. Carrie, however, checked his forward leap. Her observant glance had discovered something far more sinister under the shadow of the shrubs that bordered the unclipped lawn. The pale glimmer of a man's upturned face!

The man had been struck a vicious blow from behind. There was blood matted in his hair, but he was not dead. Carrie examined his pulse and nodded to Aleck. Aleck produced a flask from his hip pocket, forced liquor down the man's throat. In a few moments, he groaned feebly. His eyes fluttered open.

Patricia Stone identified him with a wondering gasp. He was Howard Brown, for many years her grandfather's attorney. The fiery bite of the whisky cleared his brain. He swayed to his feet, supported by Aleck's arm. Pointing toward the opened window of the house, he began to whisper with frightened eagerness.

The lawyer's story was grimly simple. His own home was located a mile or so down the lonely road from the estate of his late client. He had been reading a long judicial decision in his front study when he heard a mysterious automobile roar past. He glanced out and saw that the car was a taxicab from Boston. It worried him because he knew the Stone mansion was empty and no one had a legitimate reason to drive out so late at night, except the dead man's granddaughter, Patricia. The passenger in the taxi was a man, with a dark hat brim pulled low over his forehead and eyes.

Howard Brown had hesitated. But when he saw the taxicab race back toward Boston—empty this time—he had made up his mind. He drove swiftly to the mansion, found a window open on the ground floor. He was approaching warily—when a man sprang at him from behind. That was all he knew until the bite of Aleck's whisky revived him.

"Where's your car?" Carrie whispered quietly.

Howard Brown stared dully at the empty drive.

"I left it parked yonder. Whoever struck me must have hidden it to avoid suspicion."

"Wait here with Patricia until we go inside and have a look," Aleck said.

But the lawyer shook his head. The dead man had been his client. He had a duty to perform. Patricia, too, turned stubborn. She insisted on helping to search the house. Carrie nodded assent, much to Aleck's surprise.

THE lock on the inside of the window was not damaged, and Carrie refastened it with a grim smile. The silence in the darkened house was profound. Carrie led the way toward an inner hall, moving silently on tiptoes. A gun gleamed in her hand. Aleck, too, had drawn his pistol. They paused at the foot of a dark staircase that led to the second floor.

The crashing explosion from above

came without warning. The distant echo of a pistol shot! Patricia screamed. Howard Brown cringed backward in alarm. But Carrie was already sprinting swiftly up the carpeted stairs. Aleck was right behind her.

They raced along the upper hall toward an opened door. The room was evidently the old millionaire's study. In the light of a dropped electric torch that lay on the floor, a desk was dimly visible, walls lined with bookcases and a queer bronze statue.

It wasn't the statue that made Carrie cry out. Two objects were lying on the floor in front of it. One was a leather-covered Bible. The other was the body of a red-haired woman.

Carrie found the light switch and flooded the room with illumination. She bent swiftly and picked up the fallen Bible. The soft leather covers were stiff. Evidently, metal plates had been sewn inside the leather to add weight to the book. She handed it to Patricia Stone and the girl nodded dazedly.

"It's the Bible grandfather sent me."

Her eyes widened with horrified recognition as she stared at the red-haired woman on the floor.

"It's Anna—my maid in New York, who quit her job when I caught her trying to steal the book! Was *she* the one who—who cut Dexter's throat on the train?"

Carrie Cashin didn't answer. She gazed at the dead woman who lay crumpled in front of the statue. There was a bullet wound in Anna's forehead. Carrie had a queer hunch that the bullet that had killed the maid might have come from within the statue itself.

Like everything else connected with the accentric old millionaire, it was a religious statue. A bronze figure of David, poised to swing the famous slingshot that had brought down the giant Goliath. The sling was held tautly in the bent right hand. The left arm was held horizontally outward, as if to steady the figure. Between the bronze legs was a flat surface on the base of the statue, that looked to Carrie exactly like the pan of a weighing machine.

The strange message of the miserly old millionaire to his granddaughter flashed grimly through Carrie's mind:

> Weigh carefully every word in this Bible and it will turn you to the truth.

Evidently the old man had feared thieves. The red-haired Anna had been weighed—and found wanting!

Carrie bent over the dead woman. Something about Anna's copper-colored hair didn't look exactly right to her. Carrie tugged, and it came away in her hand. It was a red transformation worn over blond hair the color of butter. The dead woman was the blonde who had detained Carrie in the Pullman smoking room, while a murderer had slit the throat of the drugged Rodney Dexter in Upper Seven!

CARRIE didn't say anything. She had turned and was staring toward the closed door of a closet across the room. Some one's hasty foot had kicked the carpet up in front of that closed door, rumpling it.

Carrie's pistol lined on the door.

"Come out of that closet with your hands up!" she cried in crisped challenge. "Or I'll empty my gun through the panel!"

There was a muffled gasp; then, the door opened. A man emerged with his hands above his head. A young man with a white face and stony eyes. He cringed at the terrified cry Patricia Stone uttered.

"Richard! For the love of Heaven —what are you doing here?"

He glared at the dead blonde on the floor.

"I didn't kill her," he mumbled thickly. "It—it was an accident. I —I saw what happened through the closet keyhole."

"So you're Richard, eh?" Carrie said evenly. "Richard Sharpley, I presume, fiancé of this girl you lied to. You told Patricia you weren't going to leave New York. How did you get here? On the same train that Rodney Dexter took?"

Sharpley shook his head.

"I flew by plane. I—I had a feeling something terrible might happen to Patricia. So I—I flew to Boston and hired a taxicab and——"

His voice trailed. Carrie's gun forced him to continue his halting explanation.

He had entered the house through a rear cellar window. He had reached the millionaire's study when he saw the flash of an approaching electric torch. Hiding inside the closet, he had watched the red-haired woman through the keyhole. She crept close to the bronze statue of David. She laid the Bible on the weighing pan between the statue's feet. She had barely straightened when the mouth of the statue flamed and a bullet drilled her through the forehead.

"How did the Bible get back on the floor?" Carrie snaped.

"I—I don't know. It happened so fast——"

"All right. We'll find out."

Crouched to one side, on hands and knees, Carrie laid the weighted Bible on the flat pan between the statue's feet. For ten seconds, nothing happened. Then there was a stunning report as flame spurted from the statue's mouth. A bullet thudded into the wall on the opposite side of the room. The weighing pan tilted slowly, spilling the Bible to the floor. It sank level again. The deadly device was waiting for another thief!

Aleck uttered a startled oath. Carrie walked quickly to the closet, stepped inside, closed the door. When she reappeared, she spoke with quiet distinctness to the fiancé of Patricia.

"You lied to me. You can't see that statue through the keyhole. You came to this room with that crooked blonde—as her partner!"

SHARPLEY denied it. His face was still pale, but he was beginning to get his nerve back.

"I'll admit I lied. I actually watched the killing from behind the doorway portières. When the shot roared and I heard you rushing upstairs, I jumped inside the closet to escape detection—and I lied to explain why I was there."

Aleck had drawn handcuffs from his pocket. Carrie shook her head. Her expression was enigmatic.

"There's a few things not quite clear to me yet. For instance, that deadly statue. Patricia's grandfather loved her and wanted her to have his hidden fortune. Why would he deliberately expose her to death?"

She turned to Patricia Stone.

"There must be a method to weigh that Bible without peril. One that *you* would know. The old man must have counted on your memory of something. Forget about the scale. Think about the statue—and the Bible. Did you ever——"

"Wait!" Patricia's interruption was tense with eagerness. "I remember now! I've seen grandfather do it dozens of times. He used that statue of David for a bookrest. He always propped the Bible in the statue's right hand—where David holds the sling."

Carrie verified the girl's excited statement. The bronze hand with the sling was bent at the wrist. It formed a perfect bookrest.

The moment Carrie propped the Bible, there was a faint click inside the bronze figure. The entire statue began to revolve on its base. It turned slowly until the outstretched left arm pointed toward the window of the old man's study. From the solid base under the statue's feet, a tiny drawer shot open with the suddenness of that of a cash register.

There were two objects inside—a long, square-shafted implement that looked like a cross between a key and an ice pick; a sheet of paper with a brief typewritten sentence.

Carrie read the message. Her glance lifted toward the bronze arm of David, that now pointed straight toward the window. There was a queer sparkle in her eyes, as though she found sensible meaning in what seemed to be another incomprehensible quotation from the Bible.

To Aleck, it seemed utterly ridiculous. Five meaningless words, typed by a religious maniac:

> Joy cometh in the morning.

"I don't understand it."

"Nor I," Howard Brown muttered.

The lawyer's face was still haggard from the attack on him in the grounds below. He kept watching Patricia's fiancé grimly. But Sharpley kept his thin lips tightly compressed. He had the expression of a man who scented a trap, and was rigidly on the alert.

CARRIE ignored both men completely. She raised the window toward which the arm of David pointed so rigidly. She thrust out her head.

The gray dawn in the sky was changing to pink. Carrie could see a weedy garden in the rear of the house, and beyond it the channel of a small brook. Farther on, the ground rose to a smooth, grass-covered hill.

"Joy cometh in the morning!" Carrie murmured as if to herself. She kept her glance on the hill for a few moments. Then she drew her head back into the room.

"Your grandfather meant for you to remember two things," she told Patricia with a quiet smile. "First, you weigh the Bible properly and the statue of David turns you to the truth. Secondly, joy cometh in the morning. In other words, *the sun rises!"*

"But——"

"Did your grandfather ever have a pet name for that grassy hill out yonder?"

"Of course!" Patricia cried wonderingly. He called it——"

"—Goliath Hill?"

It was a shrewd guess.

The startled girl nodded. "How could you possibly know that?"

"You told me he was a deeply religious man," Carrie replied. "His messages show how fond he was of the Bible. David's arm points directly toward the hill. David and Goliath would be the natural guess. And the sun is the link that joins them in a mathematical triangle."

"Triangle?" Aleck asked blankly.

"You'll see what I mean when the sun tops those trees."

The sun rose slowly, like a red ball of flame. The moment it appeared above the fringe of trees, its rays slanted in a straight line—to a spot on the summit of Goliath Hill.

"A perfect triangle," Carrie said. "A line from the sun to the hill. Another from the sun to the window. And the third is the arm of David pointing to Goliath."

"But how can you run an accurate measurement to the hill before the sunlight shifts? It's moving away fast," Aleck said.

"That's the easiest part of all," Carrie replied.

THE automatic pistol in her hand jerked level. She held her arm exactly in line with the pointing arm of the statue. The muzzle of the gun remained steady as the bullet roared.

A spurt of dust flicked upward from the hill at the exact spot where the ray of the sun stained the grass like a finger of blood.

Aleck said in a wondering tone: "Why did the old boy go to all this trouble? Why didn't he will his money directly to his favorite granddaughter?"

"Because," Patricia explained, with a catch in her breath, "he was afraid I might be cheated out of it. Rodney Dexter—the man who was murdered tonight in the Pullman sleeper—once tried to have grandfather adjudged insane and sent to an asylum. The conspiracy failed, but grandfather knew his will might be contested and broken. Mr. Brown can verify that."

The lawyer nodded.

"It's correct. Dexter brought lunacy proceedings, but the case failed in court. The old man hated him. Didn't want him to get a penny of his fortune. But he failed to reckon on a greedy outsider!"

The lawyer had whirled grimly to face Patricia's fiancé.

Sharpley glared at him.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean it's high time we unmasked a cunning crook. You killed Dexter on that train tonight! You slugged me over the head when I nearly caught that blond pal of yours sneaking into the house with the stolen Bible!"

"Oh, yeah? Prove it—if you can."

"I can!" the lawyer roared excitedly. "The proof is downstairs in this very house. If I hadn't been fuddled by that blow on the head you gave me, I'd have thought of it instantly—— Hold him! Don't let him kill me!"

Brown had leaped toward the doorway of the study. With a yell of rage, Sharpley darted after him. Aleck's forward plunge was a shade too late. A fist sent him spinning to the floor. Sharpley fled down the back stairs of the house in grim pursuit of the terrified lawyer.

He caught Brown in the lower hall of the house. Fighting desperately, both men staggered onward. As Aleck ran down the stairs, the lawyer and Sharpley lurched out of sight into the room where the window had been opened. An arm shot backward from the huddle of the two battling men. The door crashed shut behind them; the bolt clicked in the lock.

From inside the locked room, the sounds of a terrific battle were audible. A chair crashed. The lawyer's voice was raised in a bubbling scream of terror. It died in a sudden groan. Silence followed.

Aleck threw himself at the door twice before he realized that the barrier was too strong to be burst in with shoulder and hip. He backed away and fired at the lock. Three times his weapon roared. Then Aleck pried the shattered lock loose from the splintered wood. He threw the ruined door crashing open.

There was no sign of the millionaire's lawyer or of Richard Sharpley. Both men had vanished.

CHAPTER IV.

BORROWED FROM DAVID.

OVERTURNED, broken furniture showed how fierce the struggle had been. There was a smear of blood on the carpet and a few crimson drops that ended abruptly in the center of the rug.

"He slugged Brown and carried him through a secret panel in the wall," Aleck cried. "There's no other exit. The door was locked on the inside. So is the window."

Carrie Cashin nodded agreement. She had noticed the locked window the moment she entered. Aleck raced toward the wall. His fist rapped for an echo. There was none. He began to circle the room slowly, pounding fiercely in an effort to locate a hollow passage in the masonry of the old house.

Carrie Cashin stopped him with a quick, imperative cry.

"We've got to get out of here in a hurry! If we delay too long, we'll be playing the killer's game. He knows now where the wealth of Patricia's grandfather is hidden. He'll try to beat us to Goliath Hill!"

She seized Patricia's arm. The girl's face was bleak with despair at the realization of her fiancé's guilt. Aleck followed the two women.

They unlocked the back door of the house and raced across the weedy expanse of a neglected garden. A wooden bridge beyond the garden spanned a small brook where the ground dipped. Crossing the bridge, the trio ran panting up the grassy slope of Goliath Hill.

The rays of the rising sun had already moved. They no longer touched the surface of the hill at the spot where Carrie had first observed the crimson slant from the fringe of near-by trees. But Carrie's shot from the study window had left an unmistakable mark. In fact, it had left two marks!

Aleck frowned as he saw the twin bullet holes in the turf.

"How the devil can that be?" he queried. "You fired only once. Do you think that someone else——"

"No one else could have done it," Carrie contradicted quietly. Her brown eyes were shining with satisfaction. "Both holes were made by my one bullet. The second hole is where the slug struck an obstacle and ricocheted from the ground. It points to exactly what I anticipated—a roofed, underground chamber."

Dropping to her knees, she dug at the grass with the peculiar ice-pick key she had found in the base of the bronze statue of David. She discovered that the hill had been freshly sodded at this point. It was easy to pry up the square sods. A horizontal barrier in the earth was disclosed. It was about six foot square, and it rang faintly under the rap of Carrie's knuckles. The trapdoor was metal!

Exactly in the center of the steel was a tiny square hole. It matched the peculiar shaft of Carrie's ice-pick key. She shoved it in and pressed. It wasn't necessary to turn the implement. The pressure of the point did the trick. The metal plate slid aside into an oiled groove. Steps led below to a downward slanting corridor.

Aleck remained above with his drawn gun. There was grim danger that Sharpley was lurking near by, among the trees that formed a close semicircle near the hill. Carrie and Patricia entered the cavern.

THE beam of Carrie's torch disclosed a small earth-walled chamber at the foot of the narrow, slanting tunnel. Four metal boxes stood against the wall. Each was about two feet square. Carrie's testing knuckles made a perceptible dent as she struck the lid. The metal seemed to be thin tin.

Her summoning cry brought Aleck hurrying down from above. He handed Carrie his jackknife. The knife point jabbed like the tip of a can opener. Air gushed with a thin hiss into the opening.

"Packed in vacuum," Carrie murmured. "The shrewd old man was afraid these damp underground walls might rot or destroy his wealth."

The knife cut lengthwise through the soft tin. She bent back the metal.

"Good Lord—look at it!"

The chest was crammed with bank notes. The packets were held neatly together by gummed stickers which the miserly old millionaire had evidently obtained free from some bank. There was a lower tier of rolled packages of coins. Breaking one of the paper cylinders, Carrie stared in awe at the flash of minted gold. She picked up a coin and examined it. It was a fifty-dollar gold piece!

Aleck turned back toward the steps that led to the hill entrance. Carrie stared, fascinated, at the gold coin in her hand. Suddenly, Aleck's startled yell spun her around.

A figure came plunging down the cavern steps. There was a slitted hood over his face, and he wore a long, concealing garment like a house robe. But the robe didn't quite cover his legs. Patricia screamed with horror as she recognized the gray trousers of Richard Sharpley, her fiancé.

Sharpley fired before Aleck could lift his gun. Aleck fell unconscious to the ground, his face streaming blood. The crook hurdled the body, the gun in his long-sleeved hand menacing Carrie Cashin and the paralyzed Patricia.

"Get over against the wall!" he grated. Greed made his rasping voice sound scarcely human.

Carrie's glance flicked swiftly toward where her automatic pistol lay impotently on the floor. She had dropped it there in her eagerness to rip open the first of the treasure boxes. Too late, she realized her mistake. She backed up, helplessly, knowing that to clutch for her gun was suicide. Her only weapons were Aleck's jackknife in one hand, and a gold coin in the other.

Suddenly, she sprang behind Patricia, shielding herself from the leveled gun of the killer. He laughed hoarsely at her cowardice. It didn't matter to him which girl he killed first. His finger tightened, prepared to send a bullet crashing through the body of Carrie's helpless shield.

But Carrie said something that paralyzed the robed killer's trigger finger.

"Why not take off that silly disguise, Mr. Howard Brown? You're not really fooling anyone but yourself!"

THERE was a gasp from the gunman, then a cackle of ugly laughter. His free hand whipped the hood from his head, disclosing the bloodless face of the millionaire's lawyer. There was a smile on Howard Brown's thin lips, but his face was no longer hypocritically gentle. It was cold and pitiless.

"You're a very smart young lady, Miss Cashin. How did you guess the truth? It would be amusing to know —before I kill you."

Carrie remained prudently hidden

behind Patricia's shrinking figure, as if afraid to face the rip of a bullet from the killer's weapon. But her concealed hands were not idle. She was talking merely to gain time. The hand that held Aleck's knife was lifting the hem of her skirt. No hint of that motion was apparent in the calm face that peered over Patricia's shoulder. Inch by inch, the dress crept higher and higher on Carrie's shapely legs, as she explained her detective reasoning to the gloating crook with the gun.

"I didn't suspect anyone until I discovered the body of the maid in that upstairs room. The tip-off was the fact that the blonde had the *real Bible*—the one stolen from Dexter on the train. The blonde couldn't have taken it herself, because she was talking to me in the Pullman smoking room when Dexter was killed in Upper Seven and the Bibles switched. She could only have regained the Bible from young Sharpley—or from Mr. Brown, the lawyer. The fact that you were struck on the head outside that open window downstairs didn't clear you of guilt. *You* might have been the man in the taxicab from Boston—and the blonde slugged you to grab the clue to a dead millionaire's wealth."

"Your logic is bad," Howard Brown jeered. "Sharpley could have killed Dexter on the train. He could easily have slugged me outside the window. You still had no reason to pick me as the murderer."

"Correct," Carrie agreed tonelessly. Her skirt was no longer hoisted on her bare thigh. She had accomplished what she desperately wanted to do. Yet no hint of tension appeared in her quiet voice.

"I had to make my final choice between you and Sharpley. "I did it by solving the secret of the treasure code in front of both of you. I knew that the real crook would be over-anxious to get hold of the treasure first. He'd invent an excuse to leave quickly. And you did, Mr. Brown!

"You rushed away with a fake excuse about proving Sharpley's guilt—and Sharpley was fool enough to follow you in the belief that you were trying to frame him with manufactured evidence. Sharpley could never have known about the recess in the wall, where you both disappeared. He was not familiar with the house. As the old man's trusted attorney—*you* were! You slugged Sharpley, faked a groan to make believe you were the victim, and then changed clothes to keep up the deception to the last. Also, it would have been impossible for you to see a man in that cab, from your window, on a dark country road at night. I knew you were lying when you told that. Am I correct?"

Howard Brown's grin was ghastly in its pitiless menace.

"You've solved everything except how to save your own life," he admitted harshly. "I killed Dexter on the train. And now I'm going to kill you—and Patricia—and that damn fool assistant of yours!

ON the floor behind the lawyer the bloodstained Aleck groaned suddenly. His eyes fluttered feebly open. He was nowhere near his gun, but the lawyer, with his back to Aleck, didn't know that. His gaze flicked over his shoulder for the millionth part of a second.

That was the break Carrie had been praying for. Her shove threw Patricia staggering aside. Carrie's muscular hands jerked apart in a swift gesture. There was a golden streak in the air. Something struck the lawyer on the temple, stunning him for an instant.

He swayed backward—and Carrie dived at him like a streamlined thunderbolt.

Her hand wrenched the gun from his dazed fingers. She struck without mercy. The butt made a sound like a bat meeting a baseball. Howard Brown dropped senseless to the floor.

But Carrie took no chances. She kicked off her shoes, peeled off both stockings and bent with swift energy over the unconscious killer. When she straightened with a panting breath that was half a sob, half a hysterical laugh, the lawyer's wrists and ankles were tightly bound with fetters of taut silk, whose knots were so tight that they bit deeply into the flesh.

The reaction made Carrie sway weakly. She was close to fainting herself. Carrie sat down suddenly on the earth floor of the cavern. But the sight of Aleck being helped to his feet by a tall young man with a bloody stain on his forehead restored Carrie's nerve.

The young man was Richard Sharpley. He had recovered consciousness and had found his way from the hidden wall passage in the house. Dressed in the lawyer's discarded trousers, he gaped foolishly at the captured killer. He had arrived too late to do anything except reassure the trembling Patricia, who collapsed in his arms with a cry of joy.

"Are you hurt badly, Aleck?" Carrie asked her assistant faintly.

Aleck grinned. "Not as bad as I look. The bullet from Brown's gun sliced across my forehead and spilled a lot of blood. But I'm okay."

He stared at her with puzzled admiration.

"How in the name of time did you knock out that damned lawyer so neatly? He had the drop on you!"

Carrie didn't answer. She bent without a word toward the floor of the cavern and picked up two objects. One was a fifty-dollar gold piece. The other was a garter she had slashed loose from her leg while she was shielded from sight behind Patricia.

She drew the garter taut and the gold piece whizzed against the wall with terrific impact.

"A slingshot!" Aleck gasped.

Carrie Cashin smiled unsteadily. "With modern improvements," she said. "A little trick I learned by observing the statue of David. I don't think David would have approved of using a lady's garter to bring down Goliath—but after all, I'm only a woman!"

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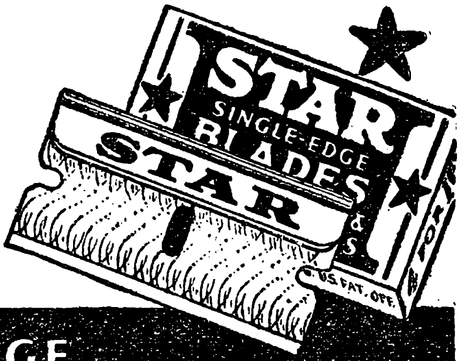

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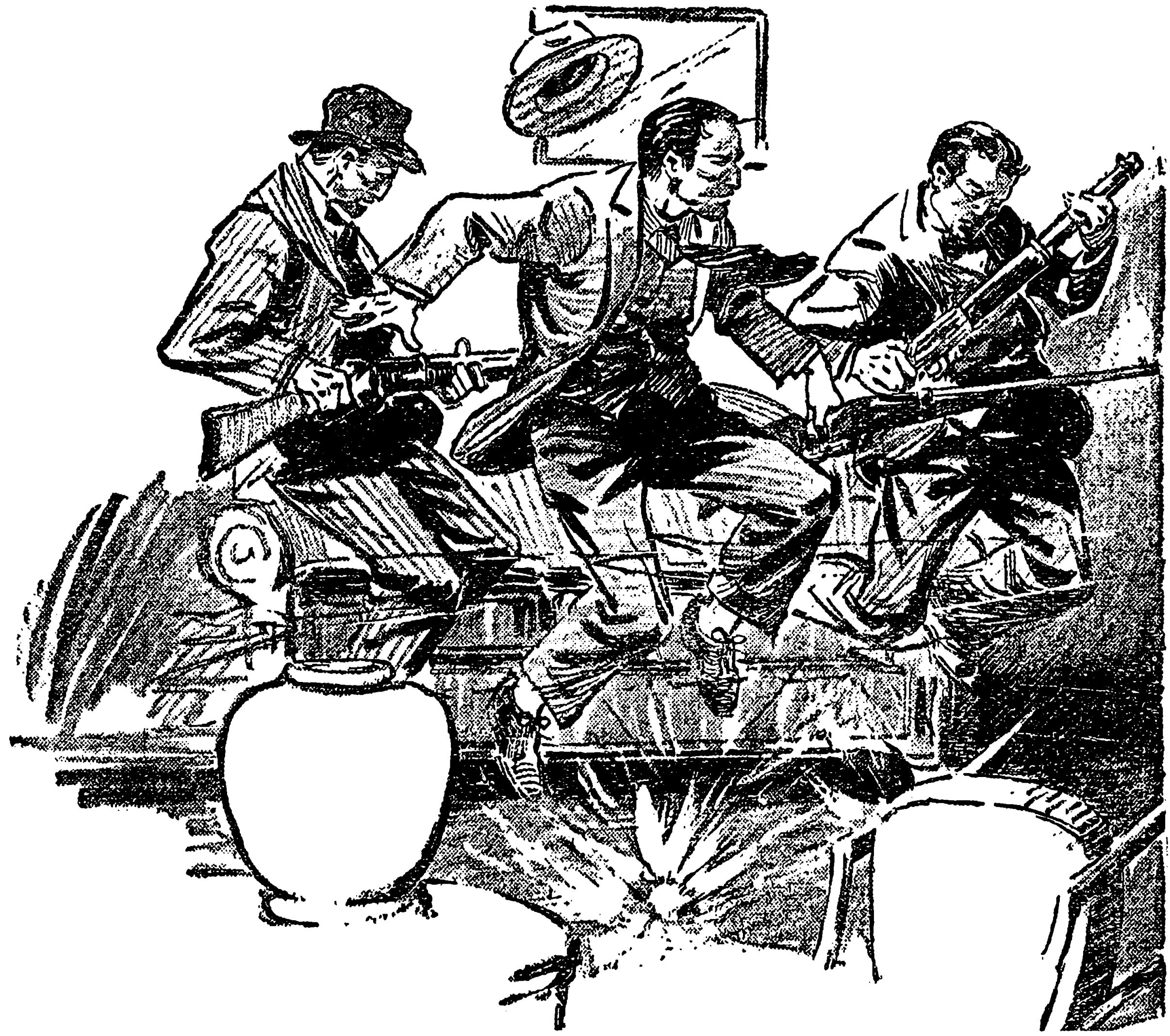


No one would believe that the Gadget Man was involved in a mess because there was a toad that talked!

HE was an Indian, a rather lean and wiry American Indian, and he had three feathers in his hair—two red feathers and a yellow one. He scraped the feathers against the top of the cabin door when he got into the plane, and one feather fell out and was caught by the wind from the propellers and blown away. The Indian got out of the plane and chased the feather, his blanket flying, his moccasined feet making *sput, sput, sput* sounds as he ran. The Indian caught the feather, returned it to his hair, gathered his blanket about himself with dignity, and walked back to the plane and got in.

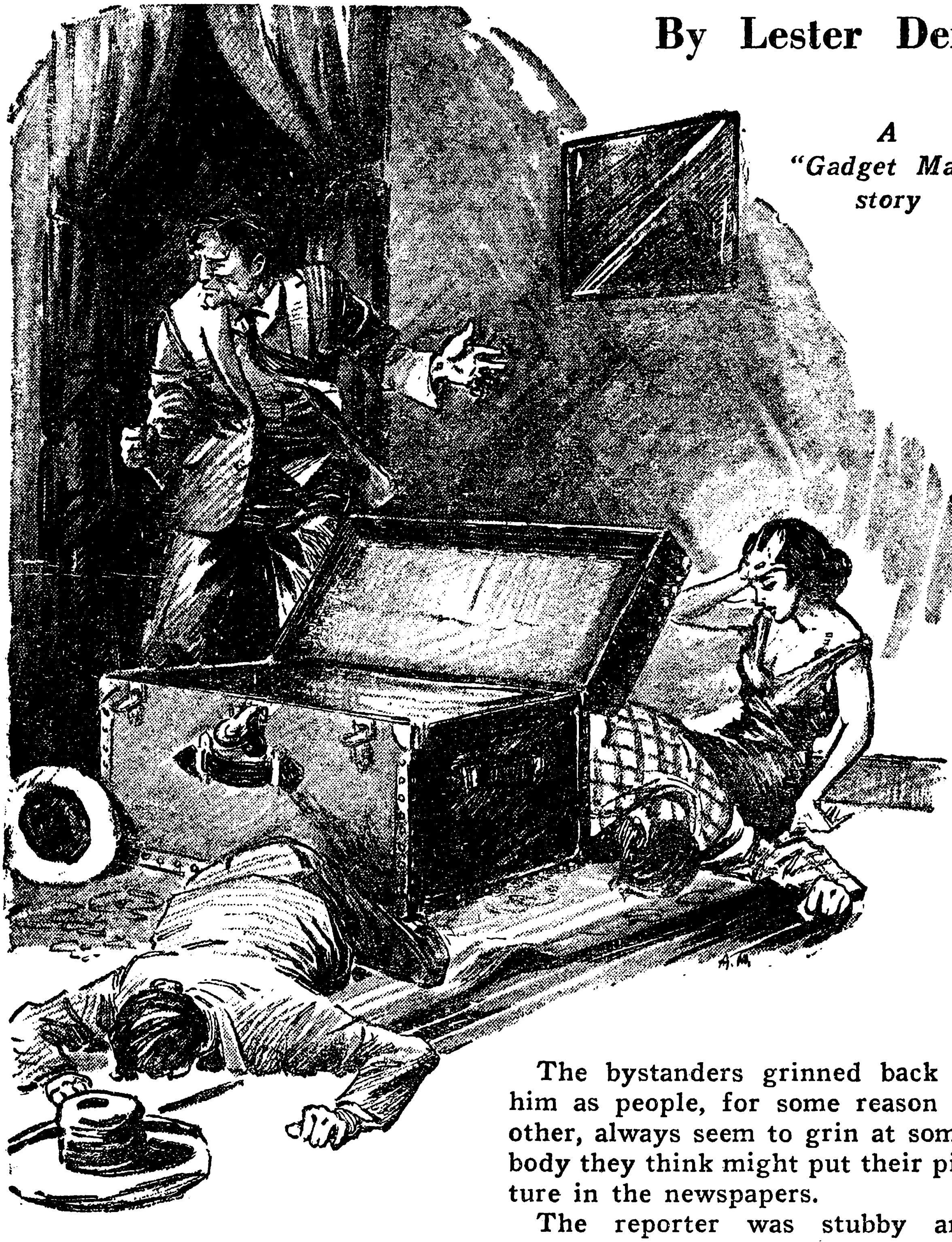
"Ugh!" he said.

Sitting in the plane seat, he could see the reflection of his deep-copper features in the plane window. He studied this reflection.

He decided he looked enough like

By Lester Dent

A "Gadget Man" story



a genuine Indian to fool anybody.

"Ugh!" he said with deep approval. *"Ugh!"*

The newspaper reporter from Tulsa, who stood in front of the airport office, lowered his camera. He had been pointing the camera at the Indian, and now he grinned at the bystanders and winked.

"Nice candid shot," he said.

The bystanders grinned back at him as people, for some reason or other, always seem to grin at somebody they think might put their picture in the newspapers.

The reporter was stubby and dressed the sloppy way that the movies have led the public to expect. A card in his hatband said, *"PRESS."* Also carefully penciled in heavy writing on the card were the words, *"TULSA GLOBE."*

The reporter went to the plane with his camera and climbed in. He took a seat across the aisle from the Indian.

The Indian leaned over and held a cupped palm under the reporter's nose.

"Ugh!" the Indian requested. "Four bits."

"Huh?"

"Ugh! Four bits."

The reporter looked astounded. "Say, Hiawatha, what the hell——"

The Indian kept his cupped palm under the reporter's nose.

"You take picture. Four bits."

"Now listen, chief——"

"No chief. Me plain brave." The Indian held his cupped palm patiently.. "Four bits regular price to let paleface take picture. Cough up. *Ugh!"*

The reporter shook his head.

"Be reasonable, Sitting Bull. I'm a newspaper reporter. Me put heap big picture in heap big newspaper, savvy? Heap good thing. *Ugh."*

"Four bits," the Indian said, "in heap hurry."

"The hell with you, Pocahontas!"

The Indian turned his cupped hand over, dropped it; the hand fell on the reporter's camera and the reporter grabbed for the camera, but he was too late to keep the Indian from getting it.

"Ugh!" the Indian said. "Now me take picture."

He lifted the camera, put the finder to his eye, pointed it at the reporter, and his forefinger poised over the shutter release.

The reporter came up out of his seat screaming in terror.

IT was a pleasant June afternoon, the sun shining bright and hot on this Oklahoma City airport, and breeze, coming in from the oil wells that had almost taken over the city, brought an odor of crude oil; while in the distance could be seen the taller buildings of the midtown business district, standing bright and neat in the sunlight.

The plane doors had been closed, the motors had started drumming, and the plane was taxiing slowly along the ground, chased by a large animated worm of brown dust.

The reporter finished his terrified scream, eyes still fixed on the camera. By now, he was out of his seat. He lunged down the aisle toward the cabin door in terror-stricken flight.

The stewardess tried to get in his way, but he elbowed her clear. Then he tore open the door, jumped out of the moving plane, and since he did not take time to use the proper technique in alighting from a moving object, he fell to the ground and became a rolling bundle of arms and legs. He got up and ran.

Behind him, in the plane, the Indian was in pursuit. But he had become entangled with his blanket, and lost time. He finally got lined out and dashed down the aisle, holding the blanket clear of his legs with one hand, carrying the camera with the other hand. He bounded out of the plane, did not fall, and took up the chase.

Indian and newspaper reporter went across the airport. The reporter lost ground, but he was still ahead when he doubled through a gate into a fenced enclosure provided for the parking of spectators' cars.

The reporter sprang into a long, expensive roadster. This car had started moving shortly after the reporter sprang out of the plane. It was driven by a man who had wide shoulders, who wore an extraordinary amount of fawn-colored cowboy hat, and who had a bright bandanna handkerchief knotted around his neck. The man had pulled the handkerchief up and it now hid that part of his face below his eyes.

Roadster, reporter and the man who was hiding his face all left in haste.

The Indian, having lost the race, came to a stop. He threw back his head and emitted a lengthy and rather elaborate war whoop, modulating it in the approved fashion by patting his mouth with his hand.

The plane had stopped. The Indian arranged his blanket and walked back with dignity, carrying the camera out at shoulder height in front of him, as though it were a scalp.

The plane pilot, co-pilot and stewardess all had questions to ask him.

"Ugh!" the Indian explained. "Reporter paleface a hyperphotophobiac."

"A what?"

"Ugh."

There did not seem to be much more that could be done about the peculiar incident, because the Indian now reduced his vocabulary to a series of *"Ughs."* So the big passenger plane took off and flew to Tulsa.

TULSA from the air had a more clustered appearance than Oklahoma City, particularly the business district, where the tall skyscrapers that oil had built were grouped closely and, from a distance, gave the appearance of being minarets on a medieval castle.

The plane came in across Mohawk Park and the reservoir, landed at the municipal airport and taxied up to the big hangars that stood across the road from the flying school.

The co-pilot sprang out of the plane and disappeared inside the waiting room.

Porters began unloading baggage from the plane. Over half of the total baggage consisted of dark saddle-leather cases, all with the same color, workmanship, handles and hardware, but of different sizes and shapes. These similar cases were placed in a separate stack.

The Indian found a taxicab, and was helping the driver load the stack of similar bags into the cab when the co-pilot came out of the waiting room and approached.

"Well, I found a dictionary," the co-pilot said.

The Indian did not seem interested.

"Hyperphotophobia," the co-pilot said, "is being scared of a camera, eh?"

"Ugh," the Indian agreed. "Special kind of scared."

The taxicab hauled the Indian into Tulsa, where he registered at the most impressive hotel, and gave the bellboy who carried the bags a five-dollar tip.

"Ps-s-s-t!" the bellboy told his fellows. "Rich Osage Indian in Suite 1103."

The word went around.

The Indian, left alone in his hotel room, took the camera to the window. He opened the window.

Across the street stood a building topped by a flagpole from which flew a flag advertising used cars; and behind this was another, higher building, the side of which was a solid blank wall of brick.

The Indian aimed the camera at the flag which advertised used cars. He peered into the view-finder, which was a telescopic thing with lenses and crossed wires.

He pressed the shutter trip. Something went *clank!* inside the camera. The rope holding the flag came apart. The flag fluttered down. Beyond, a puff of brick dust flew out of the wall.

"Ugh!" the Indian said. "Telescopic sight and everything."

He sat down on the bed, took a

screwdriver out of one of the similar cases, and dismantled the camera.

The silenced single-shot pistol inside the camera did not shoot through the lens. Nothing so crude as that. There was a mechanical arrangement which whisked the lens aside the instant the shot was fired.

CHAPTER II.

THE GADGET MAN.

THE toad was about the size of a medium-built bulldog, and it had some of the characteristics of a bulldog, particularly an, "I'd-as-soon-eat-your-leg-off-as-not!" expression around the eyes. The toad was made cleverly of papier-mâché and other material molded over a brass framework, and it had a mossy-looking back with warts, a belly the color of the Missouri River. It sat with its red mouth perpetually wide open.

The Indian got this toad out of one of the cases, plugged a connecting wire into a wall socket.

He took the shade off the electric table light, switched the light on and maneuvered the glowing bulb inside the toad's mouth; then he waited.

Soon the heat from the bulb caused a thermostat concealed under the toad's tongue to close; this switched on a wired-radio "transceiver" also hidden in the toad, and the Indian was now ready to hold a conversation with someone hooked on to the city lighting system with another "transceiver."

He leaned close to the toad's ear, where the microphone was concealed.

"Do you know how many times I've been called Hiawatha since I left Los Angeles?" he demanded sourly.

The voice of the toad chuckled. This time, the voice sounded as though it were being disguised by speaking through about two feet of rubber hose.

"And that is all that happened to you—being called Hiawatha?" the voice asked.

"All that happened until I got to Oklahoma City," the Indian said sourly.

"And in Oklahoma City?"

"The newspaper reporter came around."

"Newspaper reporter?"

"He said so. He wasn't a very good actor, and I got the idea right away that he had come out to the airport looking for me."

"For Johnny One Arrow, you mean," the voice of the toad suggested.

"O. K. The reporter asked the plane pilot to be sure, and the pilot said I was Johnny One Arrow. So the reporter pointed his camera at me and waited for a good ripe time to shoot me, only in this case the shooting was to be done with a silenced pistol of a thing inside the camera."

The Indian had been speaking in a perfectly clear, normal and rather grim voice, which bore no trace of an aboriginal accent, and he did not resort to any more *"Ughs!"*

"Just as I got in the plane," he continued, "the reporter drew his bead, so I had to knock a feather out of my hair and keep very busy chasing it. You see, a target has to stand still before you can get a sure-fire sight on it with the camera thing."

"Then what?" the toad asked.

"Then the reporter got away." The Indian leaned closer to the toad, and wearing a dark scowl, but speaking in a pleasant voice, asked, "You wouldn't be going to surprise me?"

"Surprise you?"

"You wouldn't," the Indian said,

"be going to tell me what it is all about?"

The toad chuckled long and gleefully.

"And spoil the fun?" it asked.

"One of these times it's gonna be me who gets spoiled," the Indian said, and glared.

"You got one half of a ten-thousand-dollar bill, didn't you?"

"I know, but——"

"And you've always gotten the other half of the bill when you solved a case, haven't you?"

The Indian lost his temper and began yelling.

"Blast it!" he shouted. "Who tried to kill me in Oklahoma City?"

"A newspaper reporter, you said."

"Why, I mean?"

"Because you were pretending to be Johnny One Arrow."

The toad seemed to be enjoying itself.

"They didn't know," it added, *"that you were Clickell Rush."*

The toad chuckled some more.

"Now that you've got the bear by the tail," it said, *"let's see you find the bear."*

CLICKELL RUSH took the black-haired wig containing the three feathers off his head, threw it on the floor, stamped on it; then, he took off his brightly colored blanket, wadded it and hurled it at the bed, but the blanket spread out in the air and landed on the bed with a gentleness which in no way expressed the thrower's wrath.

He jammed his face close to the ugly face of the toad.

"I quit!" he howled. "I won't mess with another one of these crazy cases! I quit! I'm done! If it's the last thing I ever——"

He stopped, because the toad was silent; the other "transceiver" had been switched off.

Rush sat down on the bed, fists jammed on his knees, and eyed the toad—Bufa. That was the name the voice sometimes gave the thing. "Bufa, of the species *Bufonidæ,* which feeds upon slugs and snails—human variety." That was what the voice sometimes said.

"Nutty!" Rush said. "Nutty as a squirrel's idea of Heaven."

It had all started months ago when Click Rush, inventor of almost a thousand gadgets for catching crooks, had gone to New York hoping to peddle his inventions to police departments, and had been laughed at as a crank.

He came away beaten.

Then he found Bufa, the toad, in his hotel room, complete with instructions as to how to make it talk.

Rush was to turn detective and use his inventions to solve an unusual crime, after which he'd get the other half of a ten-thousand-dollar bill on which the gadget man had found the toad was sitting. That was what the toad had said. It was fantastic. But he had solved that crime, and now——

Well, he was still solving fantastic crimes. But now he didn't want to, and probably that was the most zany part of the whole mad business—he hadn't been able to stop being a gadget detective. The unknown voice of the toad, Bufa, was managing to involve him in weird crimes, against his will. He was being outsmarted. For months now, Bufa had been too slick for him.

Bufa was clever. Bufa must be wealthy. Bufa might be man or woman and Bufa enjoyed watching Rush solve fantastic mysteries enough to pay ten thousand dollars per show. Whether Bufa actually watched Rush work, or only read about it in the newspapers, still was a mystery.

To stop being a gadget detective, it seemed Rush would have to learn the identity of Bufa.

As for this present business—in Los Angeles, Rush had found half of a ten-thousand-dollar bill in his hotel room, and the voice of the toad had told him to disguise himself as an Indian, call himself "Johnny One Arrow," and fly to Tulsa. That was all.

Rush tried to tell himself he was not following instructions because of the ten thousand dollars involved; it was to get a line on Bufa's identity.

Confusion seemed to be all he had gotten so far.

RUSH replaced the dark-haired, three-feathered Indian wig on his head, then retrieved the blanket and wrapped it around his shoulders.

He walked to the closet door, which had a full-length mirror, and examined his reflection in the mirror, changing the drape of the blanket, trying various stances, making assorted faces at himself.

"Ugh!" he said disapprovingly. "Sometimes I wonder if you ain't heap crazy and imagining all this stuff."

The telephone interrupted with a quarrelsome snarl.

"Hotel porter speaking," a voice said. "Shall we send your trunk up?"

"Trunk?" Rush said quizzically.

"Yes. It just arrived."

"Where from?"

There was a delay, evidently while the porter examined labels on the trunk. "From Los Angeles."

Rush absent-mindedly scratched his head, and one of the feathers fell out. He picked up the feather and contemplated it sourly.

"Send it up," he told the porter.

After he pronged the telephone receiver, he carefully stuck the feather back in his black wig.

He had not shipped any trunk from Los Angeles.

He sat there, pondered this development, told himself the sensible thing to do was quit it now, until knuckles drummed the door.

"Come in," Rush said, supposing it was the porter with the trunk.

Three Indians came in. They did not wear blankets or feathers, were very modern-looking Indians, and the most modern part of them was the automatic pistols they presented for inspection as soon as they were inside the door.

They seemed in no hurry. They gave him plenty of time to inspect the gun snouts.

They were young Indians; under thirty, Rush judged, although it was hard to tell. Their suits appeared to be tailored, their shoes had been shined recently and their clothing was all in good taste, although the neckties were a little loud.

Finally, one said, "Where is Johnny One Arrow?"

"Me Johnny One Arrow," Rush replied with dignity.

"Who you kidding?"

"Eh?"

"Johnny One Arrow," the Indian said, "is my father."

"How, papoose," Rush said gravely.

"Where's the trunk?"

Rush said, "It's not the bunk. I wouldn't tell anybody any bunk, because bunking is not my line——"

"Trunk—*trunk!* You heard me!" The Indian shoved his gun forward a foot. "Quit stalling! Where's the trunk?"

Rush shook his head.

"You've got me confused," he complained.

"You're liable to get your system full of lead, if you don't talk fast!"

advised the Indian with the gun.

Rush shook his head regretfully.

"Now, papoose, you wouldn't shoot your old pappy, I hope?" he said.

The Indian looked at his two companions.

"He must be crazy."

"Hell, Andy, he's kidding you," one of the others said.

The Indian called Andy put his gun in a pocket. "You keep him covered," he ordered. "I'm going to kick some of his ribs in and see if that helps."

Andy came around to the side of the bed and shoved Rush violently, so that Rush fell from the bed, landed sitting on the floor. Andy said, "Papoose, eh?" He drew back a foot and kicked Rush in the side.

There was a report a little louder than a rotten egg breaking, and Rush and Andy instantly seemed to turn into a cloud of black smoke.

INSIDE the smoke, Andy began whooping in agony. The smoke was by no means bulletproof, and Rush worked fast. He kept hold of Andy's leg, kept twisting it. Andy continued howling, then fell. Rush slugged with one fist, hitting Andy the first time, but hitting the hard floor with the second blow, and hurting his fist. Then Andy got away.

Rush came erect, dived for the bathroom, got inside, slammed the door, turned the lock and landed in the bathtub. He was an average-size man, and he made himself fit the bottom of the bathtub as closely as possible. He lay there hoping the bathtub was bulletproof.

It wasn't. Three bullets came through the door, hit the tub, and there was a clank and crack of cast iron; after which, the whole side fell out of the tub.

Rush got out of the tub and threw up the bathroom window. Outside, there was a smooth brick wall, with hard cement sidewalk ten floors below. But to the right was the bathroom window of an adjacent room.

More bullets were coming through the door, splintering holes around the lock.

Rush sat in the window. There was a small amount of smoke still coming from under his blanket, and it bothered his eyes. He wrenched off the blanket and let it fall lazily toward the street. Then he tossed away the smoke-bomb gadget which had been under the blanket; the gadget fell, still smoking, and passed the blanket.

Stretching, reaching, gritting his teeth, Rush got one hand on the ledge of the other window. He swung, hanging by the one hand——

He pulled up, got an elbow hooked onto the window ledge. He knocked the glass out of the window with his other fist, got the window up. And a year or two later—or so it seemed—he was in another bathroom.

A fat woman in a yellow robe stood in the bathroom door. The woman had yellowish hair which had all the attractiveness of binder twine, and she was very thick through hips and bust.

The woman stared at Rush, put up both hands.

"Indians!" she screeched. "Wild Indians!"

She turned and galloped out of the bedroom into the hall. Rush ran after her. The woman looked back, howled, "Indians!" again, and put on more speed.

In the hall, the woman went one direction; Rush went the other. He dived through a door marked with a red "Exit" sign, and found stairs which led downward. He descended with long jumps until he stumbled and fell, then traveled with more care.

When he walked out into the hotel lobby, he tried to breathe regularly and look innocent.

HAD he not been keeping a sharp lookout for possible trouble, he might not have noticed the newspaper with the small hole in the middle. The hole did not appear quite natural, but looked very much like a hole that someone might have torn in the newspaper to permit a watch to be kept on the elevators and the stairway.

Rush angled over casually, to have a look at whoever might be behind the newspaper.

It was a girl. An Indian girl, and one that was strikingly pretty; small, with interesting curves, long lashes that veiled her eyes, and hair that was fine and not too black. *This,* Rush thought, *is about the prettiest girl I've ever seen, Indian or otherwise.* He went over to her, stood looking down at her.

The girl seemed unaware of his presence. She gave all her attention to the paper.

Putting the paper down on her lap, she bent over it and carefully tore out another small, round piece.

The piece she tore out came from and advertisement; it was the picture of a hat some Tulsa department store was offering for sale.

Either she was absorbed in the subject of hats, or she was clever.

Rush walked out of the hotel. On the sidewalk, he picked the first car that he found open, got in and sat there as though he owned the machine.

He was sitting in the car when the three well-dressed Indians came out of the hotel. They hurried across the sidewalk and sprang into a car. Rush, suddenly realizing he had made a bad move, scrambled out and ran for the trio.

When he realized he could never catch the car containing the Indians, Rush got out of sight behind a parked truck. He watched the trio get away. They had not seen him. The car in which they rode had cost ten thousand dollars if it had cost a cent, he reflected.

He walked to the hotel doorman.

"Who were the three Indians who just left?"

"The three One Arrow boys," the doorman explained. "Sons of the famous old Johnny One Arrow!"

THROUGH the hotel door, Rush could see enough subdued excitement in the lobby to convince him the shooting and other uproar upstairs was being investigated. Also, he could hear the fat woman saying shrill things about wild Indians. She had a voice as squeaky as ungreased wagon wheels.

Rush sauntered away, walked three blocks, entered a drugstore and bought a remover for the stuff which gave his face its coppery hue.

Next, he went to a men's clothing store, where he bought a suit, shoes, socks, shirt, necktie and hat, all in shades of brown. He liked browns. He changed in the store dressing room.

Stripped, Rush was suddenly not an average man. His body was as wrapped with wiry sinew as the frame of a professional acrobat; he was almost unnaturally muscular. When he twisted to loosen the top on the jar of dye remover, which had stuck, lithe thews stood out incredibly in his arms.

He asked the clothing store clerk, "Ever hear of old Johnny One Arrow?"

"Who hasn't!" the clerk said, surprised.

"What about him?"

"An Osage Indian. Owns half the Osage land around Pawhuska, where oil wells are thicker than pores in your skin."

"Rich, eh?"

"Filthy with it." The clerk absent-mindedly dry-washed his hands at the thought of all the Johnny One Arrow money. "They say he's one of the richest men in the world, only he's got the good sense not to advertise it. Any anyway, he's as stingy as Scrooge, I've heard."

Rush said, "*Ugh,* heap—er—I mean—thanks!"

The street was warm and bright with sunlight, busy with traffic. Standing on a corner waiting for a stop light, Rush saw among the passing vehicles a truckload of oil field pipe, a smaller red truck labeled, "DANGER—NITROGLYCERIN!" and four different coupés fitted with bit-rack beds for carrying oil-drilling bits. The rest of the traffic might have been on the street of any city, except that there might be more big cars.

Walking into the hotel lobby, he saw no evidence that anyone recognized him.

There was no sign of the Indian girl who had torn hat advertisements out of a newspaper.

He rode an elevator up to his room.

POLICEMEN stood at the room door; more cops were inside.

Then the fat woman came out of the room, looked at Rush and complained shrilly, "They don't believe me, young man! I tell them a wild Indian chased me all over the hotel, and they don't believe me!"

Rush shook his head disapprovingly, said, "Lady, you should beware of the panther sweat these Oklahomans use for liquor."

"The idea! Young man, I've a mind to slap your face!"

She flounced away, muttering about wild Indians and sassy young men.

Rush went to the door of his room.

One of the cops blocked him. "What's eating you?"

"Curiosity," Rush explained.

"Go away. We got enough trouble as is."

Through the hotel room door, Rush saw a man had been examining the contents of the cases which were alike except for size and shape—the cases that contained Rush's equipment. The searcher straightened.

"This stuff," he announced, "seems to belong to somebody named Clickell Rush."

"Find any fingerprints on the stuff in the cases?"

"Sure."

"Photograph them."

Another cop said, "Well, we'd better put out the word to arrest this Clickell Rush for murder."

Rush, outside the door, swallowed hard.

"Murder?" he said.

"G'wan away!" ordered the cop.

Rush went downstairs and located the hotel porter's room, where all heavy baggage entering the hotel was first taken. He was seeking the trunk which had been shipped from Los Angeles by someone.

It was a large, black, metal trunk—and two policemen and two hotel porters were looking at a dead body in the trunk.

CHAPTER III.

OSAGE COUNTRY.

THE hotel baggage room was warm and quiet, and the four men—the two policemen and the two hotel porters—looking at the body in the trunk, were gripped by that sober silence that seems to come over men in the presence of death.

One of the officers looked around slowly and saw Rush standing in the door.

"Who are you?" he asked in a low voice. "What do you want?"

Rush asked, "Where's the sergeant?"

The trunk lid was standing open, but the trunk was half turned, so that Rush could not see enough of the body in the trunk to tell whether it was white man or redskin, or whether it was male or female. A tweed coat, which covered the part of the body that he could see, might be part of a man's coat, or a woman's. In truth, all he could tell was that there was a form in the trunk; the attitude of the four men told him it was a dead form.

"The sergeant is upstairs," the policeman said.

Rush said, "Thanks. I'll see him first. Then I'll come back."

He backed out of the room, walked from the hotel and strode rapidly along the street. All the muscles in his body, particularly those in his legs, began to feel as though they had been supporting a terrific weight which had been suddenly removed, leaving shaky weakness.

He was accused of murder.

A newsboy directed him to a place that rented trucks. He ran—but not too fast—to the place, and said, "I want to rent a small truck with a closed van body."

"We don't rent them without our own driver," the man said.

"I don't want a driver."

"That's tough, brother. Rent it somewhere else, then."

"Where's another place?"

"Hell, find it yourself!" the man said, and scowled. He was thick and sullen-looking.

"I'll hire it from you," Rush said grimly.

The sullen man drove himself. Rush rode beside him. The truck was old, but efficient, and equipped with a van body, closed by two doors at the rear. It looked secure enough to haul lions.

WHEN they had ridden four blocks, Rush reached over suddenly and slapped the driver's cheek.

"Hey!" the driver snarled. "Who you slappin'?"

"You want that mosquito to drink you dry?" Rush asked.

The driver rubbed his cheek with a hand, took the hand away and eyed the drop of crimson on his fingers.

"I oughta bust you one!" he said sourly.

A few more blocks, and the van began to wander over the pavement. Rush took hold of the wheel, guided it, and after a few moments, squirmed over and took the driver's place.

The van driver apparently had gone to sleep.

Rush left him lying in the shade of a tree beside the boulevard which runs along the Arkansas River.

While he drove back to the hotel, Rush refilled the little hypodermic device which fitted one of his fingers like a ring. The drug, which he took from a small phial, was a quick-acting anæsthetic agent, more potent than those used in surgery, and the driver might have a headache when he awakened.

Rush backed the van up to the hotel baggage entrance, then alighted and went into the baggage room. He had his story all ready for the policemen. He had been upstairs, and the sergeant in charge had authorized him to take the body and the trunk to the police station——

But the story was not needed.

The trunk stood, big and black, in the center of the baggage room.

No one was in sight.

The trunk lid was closed, and Rush took hold of it, started to lift it, then took hold of his lower lip tightly with his teeth and released the lid. Death always appalled him, and bodies were something that he hated to look at above all else.

By lifting the trunk, he could tell that there was a body inside.

He carried the trunk to the van, loaded it in the back, closed the doors with the chain arrangement which held them, and got behind the wheel.

He drove away from the hotel with the trunk.

JUDGING by what sight-seeing he had done from the plane, as it brought him to Tulsa, Rush concluded the most deserted country lay north of town. Driving in that direction, he crossed two sets of railroad tracks, passed block after block of neat bungalows, then climbed a hill which was topped by impressive mansions. After that, there was a rutted dirt road traversing red oak hills.

The Gadget Man drove with brown hat yanked over his eyes, anger in the set of his jaw.

Once, he growled, "I should've known it!"

He meant that he should have known there would be trouble. There always was, when he did anything that was suggested by Bufa, the voice of the toad!

"Blast my own greed!" he added. "And damn those ten-thousand-dollar bills!"

That was it. That was the bait that always got him into these messes. Money had enticed him into coming from Los Angeles, disguised as an Indian named Johnny One Arrow. Greed was responsible.

Two attempts to kill him. Accused of a trunk murder. And he still didn't know what it was all about.

"And if the law catches me with this body," he muttered, "it's liable to be *whango,* the electric chair! Or whatever they use for one in Oklahoma."

But if they didn't catch him, they wouldn't have a body; and it is hard to convict without a corpus delicti. It might be used as bait for a trap.

The truck passed a small oil field, one in which the wells were shallow, and where whole groups of wells were pumped by a single chugging engine, being hooked up to the engine by iron rods which sometimes extended for almost a quarter of a mile to reach the pump-jack over some remote well.

Beyond the little oil field, there were more hills. They were very short and steep hills, covered with a more hearty growth of red oaks than had furred the hills nearer Tulsa. Also, in the deep little gullies now were larger trees, cottonwoods and other kinds, and the gully beds were wide and composed of sand and gravel which water had fitted into place so expertly that the beds were almost as level as floors, and packed solidly.

The truck nosed down into the gullies with wheels almost locked, hit the flat gravel beds with a bump, then labored in low gear up the other side.

While on top of a higher hill, Rush looked back. He saw dust, which indicated another car coming behind.

As a matter of caution, he decided to drive up the next gully bed and let the car pass. But no gully bed immediately presented itself; instead, there was a stretch of flat rangeland.

On either side of the road, grader ditches had washed into young canyons which did not look as though they could be crossed by a man on horseback.

Rush was craning his head and looking at the ditches when he heard the plane.

He put his head out to stare. The plane was so close that he dodged involuntarily. It must have come down out of the sky with motor idling almost soundlessly.

Huge and yellow, hurling a great shadow below it, the plane skimmed the top of the truck. The motor snorted a time or two to steady the craft, and it landed on the road ahead and came to a stop. It was a cabin biplane probably ten years old, which made it a decrepit granddaddy, as plane ages go.

The plane appeared to hold a pilot and two passengers. The two passengers got out of the cabin, kneeled on the dusty road and pointed hunting rifles at the truck.

RUSH stopped the truck and slid down in the seat until he sat on the floor boards. There, the engine at least protected his stomach from rifle bullets. He had a particular horror of being shot in the stomach.

"All right," one of the men from the plane yelled. "We can throw lead around, or you can be sensible!"

Rush had heard that voice somewhere before.

He shouted, "What the blazes is this, anyway?"

"Get out!"

Rush got out of the truck. The two men with the rifles approached warily, and one searched Rush by slapping a hand over the places where a gun might be concealed.

One of the riflemen was the fellow who had pretended to be a newspaper reporter in Oklahoma City. He did not recognize Rush.

The other man was the driver of the reporter's getaway car in Oklahoma City. At least, he had the same wide shoulders, extraordinarily large fawn-colored cowboy hat and bright bandanna handkerchief.

"Hell, I never saw this guy before!" the reporter growled. He prodded Rush with his gun. "Who are you?"

Rush looked as scared as he could, made his voice shake, and said, "I'm jus—just a guy who was huh-hired to do this."

"Hired to do what?"

"Go to the huh-hotel and slick the cuk-cops out of a trunk."

The reporter nodded. "Yeah. We saw you do that."

The other man was chewing a cigar. He asked, "Who hired you?"

"The One Arrow boys," Rush said, taking a chance.

Both the men laughed.

"That's swell," the reporter said. Evidently he intended to say more, but instead of continuing, he turned his head and stared back along the road. In the distance, the car which had been coming behind Rush had topped a hill. It moved slowly down the hill and disappeared from sight.

"Hey!" the reporter exploded. "That's young One Arrow's car!"

"I think so, too," the other man growled. "We better get that trunk in the plane an' clear out!"

"Hell with the plane!" the reporter snapped. "We'll take this guy and the trunk in the truck, and get on up in the Osage country. Then we'll finish this."

"I don't like——"

"You haven't liked my ideas all along!" the reporter said disgustedly. "That's been the trouble. You're too full of schemes."

The other shrugged. "All right."

THEY motioned to the pilot of the plane to take off. But the aviator got out of the plane and came running back, holding an arm over his face to hide his features.

"Go on—beat it!" the reporter yelled at him. "The job we hired you for is done!"

"I don't want anybody to know about this!" the flier shouted. "Are you sure that truck driver won't identify me later?" The aviator sounded scared.

The reporter said, "This truck driver won't identify anybody. Not where he's goin'."

The aviator, still hiding his face, whirled and raced back to his plane and got in. A moment later the motor roared and the ship picked up its tail and gathered speed.

The plane ran about two hundred feet, then the wheels hit a rut. The craft bounced. It changed its course slightly, and because it did not yet have flying speed, it crashed into the deep ditch beside the road. There was a rending roar as the craft hit, and a cloud of dust arose.

Swearing, the reporter ran toward the plane.

The other man jabbed his rifle at Rush and said, "Lie down!"

Rush lay down. The man came over, took handcuffs out of his pockets and fastened them about Rush's ankles.

"Too bad we ain't got but one set of bracelets," he grumbled.

The reporter had disappeared into the ditch where the plane had crashed. Now he climbed out of the ditch and came running back. As he ran, he doubled over and scooped up handfuls of dust with which he cleaned the stock of his rifle.

"Pilot was trapped in the cockpit," he said.

"Alive?" the other asked.

"Not now." The reporter slapped his rifle stock grimly. "But they'll think the crash caved in his skull."

RUSH was thrown into the rear of the truck, alongside the metal trunk. He heard the fastenings of the truck rear doors rattling. The fastener was stout chain, and there was no chance whatever of his breaking out without attracting the notice of the two men in the front seat.

The truck got into motion.

Rush, crowding close to the front partition, listened for whatever the two men had to say to each other. Evidently, one of them stood on the running board and kept a watch on the car behind, because there were sounds indicating he had gotten back inside and slammed the door.

"It's the One Arrows, all right," he shouted over the noise of the truck motor.

"They trying to catch us?" the reporter demanded.

"Don't appear to be. They're just following."

The reporter swore angrily. "They must have been watching that hotel and saw that mug in the back snatch the trunk."

"We didn't notice them."

"Hell, we wouldn't! You know how Indians are."

The truck rolled fast, hit bumps, and Rush braced himself to keep his balance on handcuffed ankles. The trunk bounced around on the truck floor.

"Them One Arrows," the man in the cowboy hat grumbled, "must be figuring on picking their time, then closing in on us."

"That's fine. Let them close in." The reporter sounded fierce and eager. "I can take this rifle and out-shoot any six Indians ever born."

"I don't like——"

"I told you," the reporter yelled, "to shut up about what you don't like! Back there in Los Angeles, we should've just shot old Johnny One Arrow and let 'em think a burglar done it. Only you had to get smart ideas!"

THE man in the cowboy hat grumbled discontentedly. "But I wanted the whole family wiped out!"

"Yeah? And look what happened! We put the body in a trunk, and ship it to Tulsa by air express."

The reporter swore for a while.

"Then we learn somebody is flying to Tulsa under the name of Johnny One Arrow," he continued. "So we're plenty puzzled, and we smell big rats without knowing what kind. And we try to kill this fake Johnny One Arrow in Oklahoma City, and don't."

"If you had gone ahead and shot him with that trick camera——"

"Damn you, don't you go blaming me! I did my best!"

The other man said peevishly, "It was your idea, changing the address on the trunk, and sending it to the fake Johnny One Arrow in Tulsa. You said the killing would be framed on him automatically. That went wrong, didn't it?"

"Dammit, how was I to know the One Arrow boys would start looking for their old man's body? Who tipped them?"

"Well, who did?"

The reporter yelled, "Oh, how the hell do I know? Maybe that guy dressed up like a circus Indian, who booked plane passage from Los Angeles as Johnny One Arrow. The guy we tried to kill in Oklahoma City. *Who was that guy?*"

"That fellow in back can hear you, the way you're yelling!"

"Let him hear! He won't be telling anybody."

The conversation ended with that, however, and Rush stood for some time, braced against motion of the truck, and listened without hearing anything more.

He hobbled back and sat on the trunk, sat there for some time, trying to tell himself he should take a look at the body of old Johnny One Arrow. But he could not stand bodies; they filled him with horror. He should have looked at the body at the hotel, and he hadn't wanted to; he should look at it now, and he still didn't want to.

But after he had fought his own mind for a while, he unfastened the trunk and lifted the lid.

The gun which looked him in the eyes was small and bright, like the Indian girl who held the weapon.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FAT WOMAN.

NATURE has provided all living creatures with an instinctive reaction to surprise, and instilled the thing into them so deeply that it is almost impossible to defy it. Animals, birds and reptiles all move suddenly when surprised, and the instinct extends to man as well. Rush jumped, surprised by what he had found in the trunk, and because his ankles were handcuffed, he fell down.

The Indian girl got half out of the trunk, to keep her gun pointed at him. She was the same very attractive young woman who had been tearing hat pictures out of a newspaper in the lobby of the Tulsa hotel. But the girl actually had been watching him through a hole in her newspaper, Rush knew now.

She peered at him, particularly at the handcuffs which secured his ankles. The handcuffs seemed to change all her ideas.

"Who's driving the truck?" she whispered.

"Two men. One claimed to be a newspaper reporter. The other one wears a cowboy hat."

"Short, thick man?"

"The one with the hat, yes."

"Big Hat Weeks," she said grimly. "The other one really used to be a reporter. They pal around together."

She sank back in the trunk and half closed the lid. "Can they see me now?"

"No."

"I may be able to shoot the links of your leg manacles in two."

Rush shook his head. "I don't want any woman shooting at my feet. I'll get loose when the time comes." He got close to the trunk, so that his whisper would carry. "Who are you?"

"I'm Edna One Arrow."

"Johnny One Arrow——"

"My father," the girl said in a low voice.

Rush looked at her closely, and revised the somewhat skeptical ideas he had held hitherto about the legendary stoicism of the American Indian in the face of suffering.

"I'm Clickell Rush," he explained. "I'm a—well, a detective without portfolio, sort of."

"Who hired you?"

"A toad."

The girl looked at him queerly. "Toad?"

"Skip it. Go on with your story."

She shook her head.

"A crazy man!" she said. "And I was afraid the whole terrible thing was the work of a crazy man."

THE truck stopped then, and Rush realized he had lost valuable time. He doubled down quickly and felt in his left trousers cuff for the slender steel which he had threaded into the fabric when he had dressed in the clothing store. He got hold of the wire—it was less stiff than a needle, but had the same probing qualities—and went to work on the handcuff lock. He picked frantically.

When the truck doors opened, he was lying on the floor with the manacles still in place on his ankles.

"Drag him out," the reporter ordered.

Rush looked at the trunk. The girl had disappeared inside and closed the lid.

"Big Hat" Weeks hauled Rush out of the truck, got the Gadget Man over his shoulder, and walked toward a house.

The house was the last kind of structure Rush had expected to see here in these red oak hills; a brick house, low and rambling and exquisitely designed after the English style of architecture.

The house did not look as if it were being lived in.

But two tepees near by did look as if they were lived in.

The combination of a splendid but uninhabited house and a tepee that was being used, puzzled Rush—until he remembered reading something about such doings in a Sunday magazine feature somewhere. It seemed that the oil-rich redskins of Oklahoma did such queer things as erecting grandly furnished houses in the Osage hills, then disdained to live in them, inhabiting instead their tepees—which they erected in the front yards.

BIG HAT WEEKS dumped Rush on the floor inside the front door of the house.

"Help me with this trunk!" the reporter called.

They came stumbling in under the weight of the trunk, which they put down near Rush.

"Now what's next?" Big Hat Weeks demanded uneasily.

"When we shipped old Johnny One Arrow's body from Los Angeles, our idea was to frame his murder onto his sons, wasn't it?" the reporter demanded.

"Yes. Only——"

"Only a mystery man Johnny One Arrow turned up, so we thought we'd frame him by sending him the body of the real Johnny One Arrow."

"That fell through."

"All right. Here's what we do now." The reporter pointed at Rush. "We scrag all the One Arrows and frame it on the wise guy, here."

Big Hat Weeks looked at Rush and shook his head. "The law wouldn't swallow that. They'd say he didn't have any motive for knocking off the One Arrow family."

"Motive—hell!" The reporter laughed grimly. "I've figured out who this guy is."

Big Hat pointed at Rush. "Why, he's a truck——"

"Truck driver—nothing. *He's the other Johnny One Arrow!*"

"The other——" Big Hat Weeks made a gulping sound, and his mouth remained open.

"See how it stacks?" the reporter demanded gleefully. "He murdered old Johnny One Arrow in Los Angeles, brought the body here. The One Arrow family trailed him. They had a fight, and everybody got killed."

Big Hat Weeks pointed at Rush. "But who is he?"

"We don't care who he is."

They crouched down at the door and a window with their rifles, and waited for the One Arrows to come.

IT was now near evening, and the sunlight was red and warm, while under the eaves of the house, swallows made gentle sounds as they went in and out of their mud nests. There was a slight breeze, and this rustled the leaves of the red oaks which crowded close to the dwelling.

Inside the house, it was distressingly still. The air was like the air inside a furniture store; filled with the odors associated with new furniture and new rugs, for the rooms had not been lived in enough to take away newness. None of the furniture had been soiled, and none of it showed signs of use. The paint on the walls was bright and unspotted, but spiders had fashioned entanglements of gray webs in the corners.

The reporter began, "They should've showed up by——"

He stopped and grew tense.

The other man grew tense also, pressed his cheek against the rifle stock, the fatty looseness of his cheek bulging above the polished walnut of the stock.

There was the sound of a car with a good motor coming close to the house.

Rush took the handcuffs off his ankles. He had succeeded in picking the locks previously with the wire.

The reporter said, "Let's blaze away!"

Rush threw the handcuffs.

They hit the reporter; he barked, went forward on his knees, and his rifle smacked deafeningly.

Rush, leaping as he threw the cuffs, landed on Big Hat. His hands clamped on Big Hat's rifle. Big Hat reared up with Rush across his shoulders, hanging to the rifle.

Rush banded his legs around the man's ample middle.

The reporter had let fall his rifle. On hands and knees, he shook his head, clearing it. Then he clutched the rifle, felt uncertainly for the trigger and wheeled around, still on all fours, toward Rush.

The girl got out of the trunk. She started for the reporter with high hopes; but she was cramped from being in the trunk, and when she kicked at his rifle, her foot missed the weapon entirely and the high heel of her shoe peeled the side of his face. Momentum of the missed kick tipped the girl off balance, so that she fell, half turning as she went down, and her head whacked the wall very hard. The concussion of her head against the wall stunned her; she did not move after she hit the floor.

RUSH fought with his own foe, and they got against the wall. Rush, still on the man's back, put both feet against the wall, pushed hard, and the two of them hit the reporter, who was about to get organized with his rifle. The three tied up in a two-wrestlers-and-a-referee knot.

Rush began to think that the stuff from the little hypodermic ring was never going to take effect on either foe. He wore the ring; he had fanged each opponent repeatedly, but they went on fighting.

He got the range of a stomach, and pounded away. One rifle flew out of the mêlée. The other one followed. They hit the walls noisily. There was a moment when they were all locked together and straining, and in that drawn silence when muscles were as tight as fiddle strings, Rush could hear disturbed swallows beating wings and crying outside.

Then Big Hat Weeks went to sleep. A little later, the reporter did likewise.

Rush listened. It was too quiet outdoors.

From a pocket, Rush took a metal cigarette case. This held cigarettes. He counted three from the right, took all three cigarettes and broke them open.

The cigarettes were wadded at each end with tobacco, and the central portion contained small, grayish pellets. The pellets were about pinhead size, and had somewhat the aspect of worthless pearls. From the three cigarettes, Rush got a small heap of the pellets in the palm of his hand.

He sent the pellets across the floor with a tiny rattling. They scattered, and when they stopped rolling, lay all around the spot where Rush sat.

In a moment, the One Arrows came

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in. The first one in lifted a cocked rifle, pointed it at Rush.

"WAIT a minute!" barked one of the brothers. "There's no hurry."

The Indian with the rifle snarled, "He killed dad. Now he's killed sister, Big Hat and that reporter."

"There's still no hurry."

The third Indian came in, and the trio of them stood just inside the door, holding their rifles on Rush.

Rush said, "Wouldn't you like to know the motive for all these killings?"

"You're damn right!" gritted the One Arrow who was named Andy.

"So would I," Rush said.

They stared at him.

Andy said, "Let's kick the truth out of him."

The idea got instant approval. They started for Rush.

"Keep away from me!" Rush yelled.

The shout did what he thought it would do—made them jump for him more rapidly. And as they came for him, it was impossible for their feet to miss the tiny pellets which Rush had spread over the floor. When the first foot came down on a pellet, it exploded.

Probably the pellet blast was no greater than a giant firecracker. But surprise gave it the violence of dynamite. The Indian howled, lifted in the air, came down—and two pellets exploded this time. The other two One Arrow brothers jumped in to help, got on the little pellets, and the house interior took on the sound effects of a Fourth of July.

Rush heaved up, got one of the rifles away from its owner and began whipping heads with the rifle barrel.

THE man from the Indian agency—it had developed that he took charge in a matter of this kind, instead of the sheriff—was a long, grizzled individual in high-heeled boots. He had an old-fashioned handle-bar mustache which, judging from its appearance, was frequently masticated along with his chewing tobacco.

He appeared from another part of the Indian agency offices, produced his plug of tobacco, took a chew, then offered it to Rush, who declined.

"Nobody got hurt bad," he said. "But I guess they'll hang Big Hat and the reporter. That's too bad."

"Whether it's too bad is a matter of opinion," Rush said.

Edna One Arrow came in, smiled at Rush, then took a chair.

"They believe my story, even if it is pretty wild," she explained. "You see, when my father disappeared in Los Angeles, I called a detective agency. They must have notified some one else, because another voice called me back, and asked for all particulars——"

"This voice give a name?" Rush asked.

"Bufa."

Rush winced, said, "Remember that toad I told you about?"

"Yes. I thought you were crazy."

"The toad's voice is named Bufa."

The girl looked at him queerly. "That doesn't seem sensible."

"I'll say it doesn't make sense," Rush said sourly. "But go on. What happened?"

"I learned a trunk had been shipped air express to Tulsa. I also learned a man using my father's name had booked plane passage. So I came to Tulsa. My brothers and I began investigating. I saw you hire that truck and knew what you planned. The police had taken my—my father's body from the trunk, and left the trunk.

"So I got in it and you took me. I did that because I figured you would take the body to whoever had hired you to do the killing. As a matter of fact, I suspected Big Hat Weeks was back of the whole thing, and that it was a plan to wipe out our whole family."

"You suspected Big Hat?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"My father," the Indian girl said, "was very rich. And he was wise. He knew money ruins my people, so he never gave his children more than a hundred dollars a month apiece."

"I don't see what that——"

"I have an invalid sister," Edna One Arrow said.

"Eh?"

"Big Hat Weeks is married to my sister." The girl put her face in her hands.

The Indian agent got up and cleared his throat noisily.

"You see, partner," he explained, "it was just a case of a no-account squaw man killin' a passel of his wife's relatives—so she'd inherit."

IT was well on into the following day before Rush got back to Tulsa and convinced the police, with the aid of the Indian agent, that it really was a case of a man killing off relatives, so that his invalid wife would inherit Osage oil millions. The police finally accepted that much of the story.

They never would, it became apparent, accept the idea that Rush was involved in the thing because there was a toad that talked.

Rush gave up trying to explain, went back to his hotel and listened to the management complain about the bullet holes in the walls.

Later, a bellhop appeared with a package.

"The lady next door left this for you," the bellboy explained.

"Oh, I remember," Rush said. "That was the fat lady who had wild-Indian trouble."

The package contained a woman's dress, a padded contraption to give a man's hips the shape of a fat woman's, and another contraption to do the same for his chest. There was a bristling binder-twine-colored wig —the hair that had been worn by the fat woman next door.

There was also a paper, on which writing said:

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF
ME AS A FAT GIRL?
BUFA

Pinned to the note was the other half of the ten-thousand-dollar bank note.

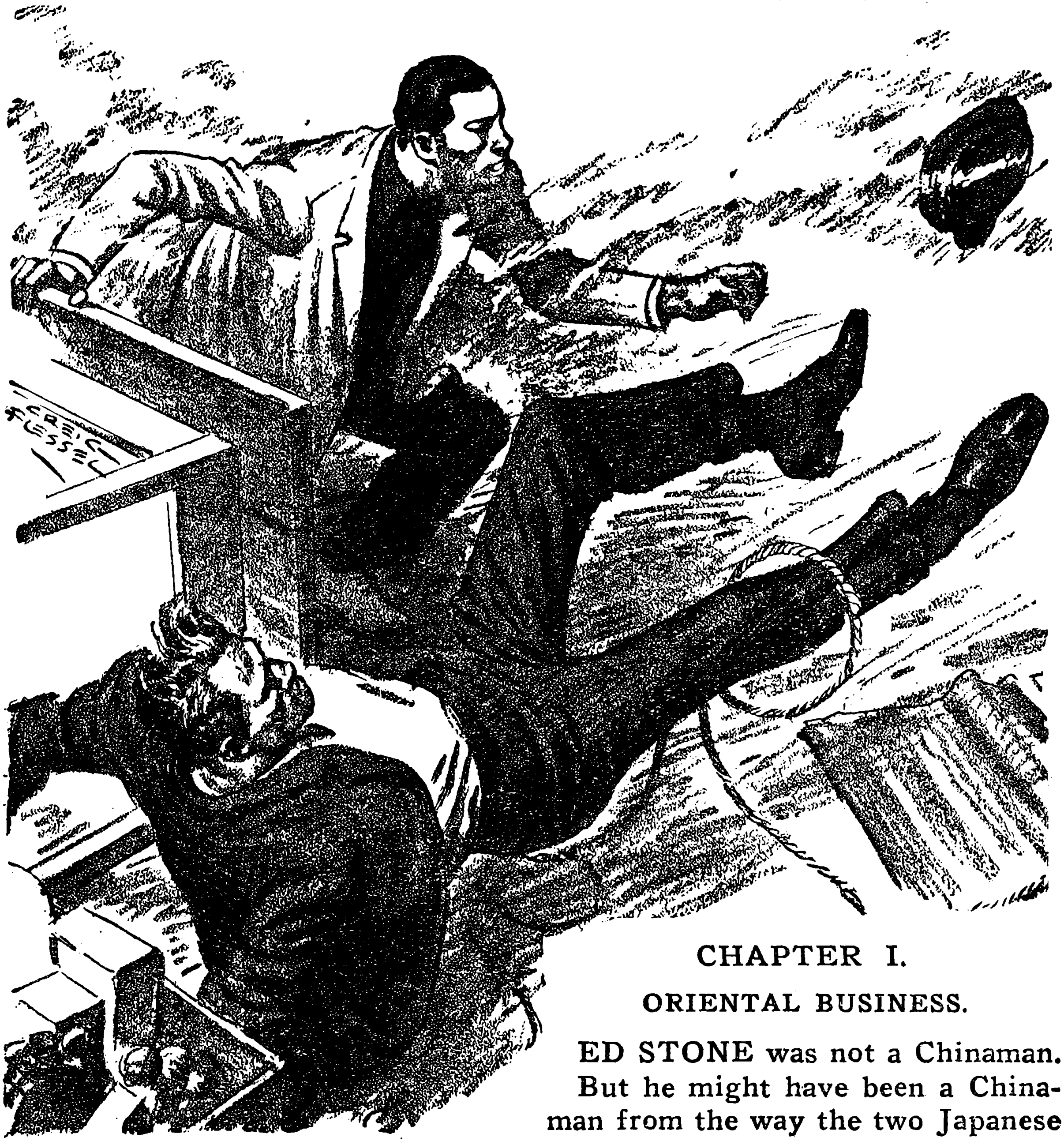
Change to
Mint Springs
and keep the change!
Mint Springs
ONE PINT
90 PROOF
KENTUCKY STRAIGHT BOURBON WHISKEY
GLENMORE DISTILLERIES CO.
OWENSBORO, KENTUCKY
A PRODUCT OF GLENMORE

Ask for this quality Kentucky Straight Bourbon. It's easy on your pocketbook.

This advertisement is not intended to offer alcoholic beverages for sale or delivery in any state or community where the advertising, sale or use thereof is unlawful.

Ed Stone, prize fighter extraordinary, teaches a few crooks that it isn't safe to play

RING AROUND A ROSEY



By Kenneth Robeson

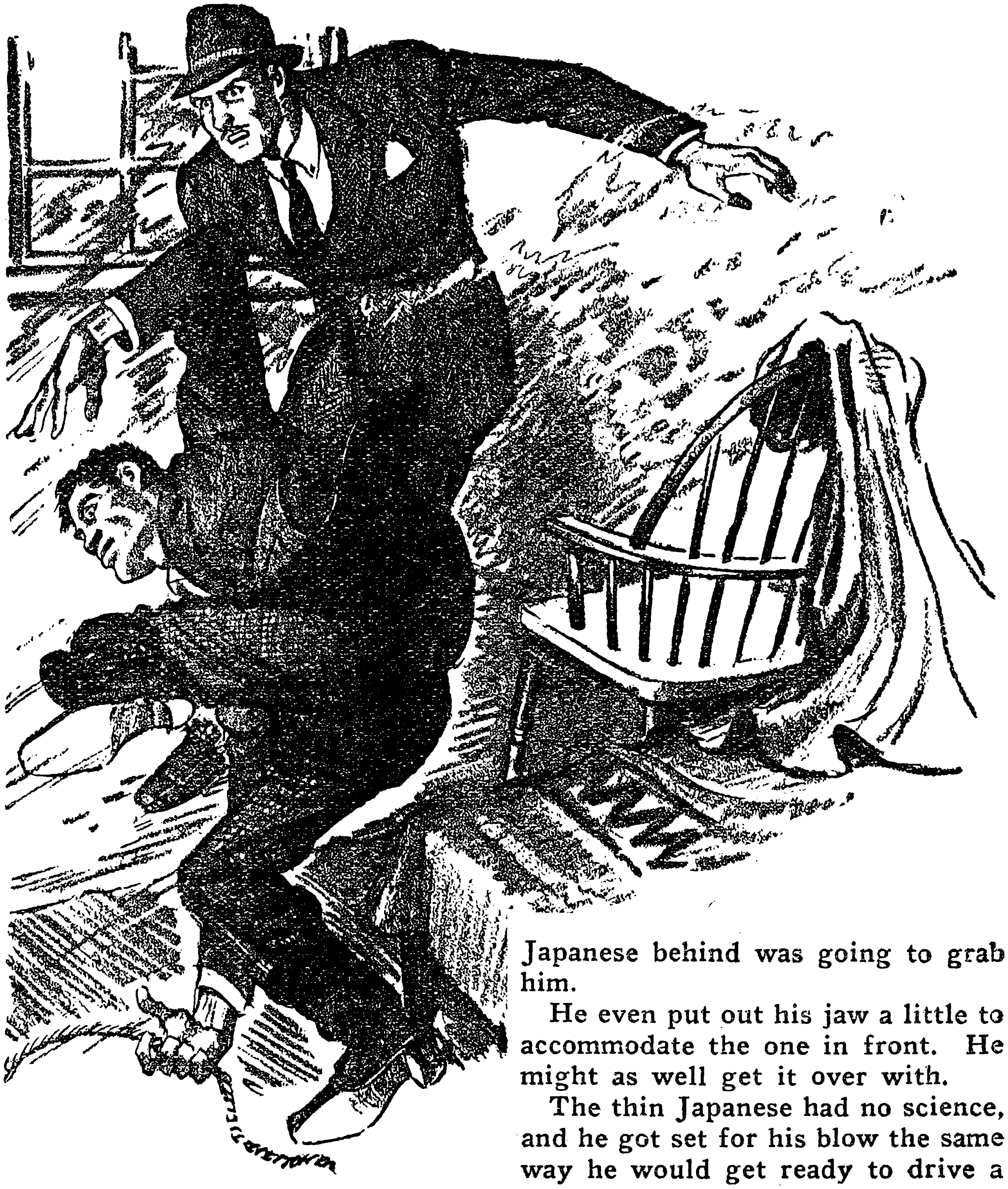
Famous author of the Doc Savage novels

CHAPTER I.

ORIENTAL BUSINESS.

ED STONE was not a Chinaman. But he might have been a Chinaman from the way the two Japanese tackled him. The two Japanese used the same tactics their country used on China. There was no formal declaration of war, and not many preliminaries.

There was just, unexpectedly, one



thin little Japanese in front of Ed Stone, and one fat little Japanese behind him.

It was a darkly deserted street.

"Match, pliss?" requested the thin Japanese.

Ed Stone did not reach for a match. He had not been a professional boxer for years for nothing—he knew the thin Japanese in front was going to slug him, and the fat Japanese behind was going to grab him.

He even put out his jaw a little to accommodate the one in front. He might as well get it over with.

The thin Japanese had no science, and he got set for his blow the same way he would get ready to drive a tent stake. Then he swung.

Ed Stone tried to look surprised, tried not to roll too much with the blow. He grunted loudly, then lay down on the sidewalk.

He was not unconscious. He was not even hurt. As a matter of fact he'd had punching bags bounce back in his face and hurt worse.

The juice of the whole thing was that he was scheduled to go into the ring with the "Montana Mauler" in two hours in the *Arena*. The Mauler was tough, tough enough that the champ was going to have to fight him or Ed Stone, depending on how it came out tonight. The Mauler had a bad left, they said. Ed Stone did not want to go in with him after being freshly kicked around by two petty park bandits.

He thought these two Japanese were small-time robbers.

The thin one eyed his own fist and looked proud of himself.

"He is twice my size, and with a great fighting reputation besides," he remarked proudly. "Yet I knocked away his senses."

The two then took Ed Stone's arms and dragged him off the sidewalk. This was a park. They hauled him behind shrubbery and began searching him.

It had now dawned on Stone that they were not two petty bandits after the loose change in his pockets.

They ignored his small roll of bills.

Having gone through his pockets and felt the lining of his coat, also scrutinized his hatband and explored in his trouser cuffs, they took off his shoes.

"It is too bad," the thin one said.

"Bad," agreed the fat one. "If he does not have a safe deposit box key or some other information hidden in his shoes, we will have to torture him."

Ed Stone didn't understand, but he could see that this was going to lead into something more.

He gave the fat Japanese, the one who was prying at the shoe heels, a short right hook. The blow traveled only inches. It turned the Nipponese end for end. Stone was worried about breaking his hand when he hit the Japanese, but the fat fellow was as resilient as a punching bag.

Stone flicked his left at the other Japanese, sent a right solidly to the man's chest. The Japanese tumbled away. Stone got to his feet.

Both Japanese now ran.

They were unarmed. The fact that they ran proved this. Stone started after them.

The two Nipponese were as fast as rabbits. They angled across the graveled park driveway.

When Stone hit the sharp gravel in stocking feet, he danced to a painful stop and promptly got back on the sidewalk. He didn't want his feet torn on jagged stones—not with the Mauler fight two hours away.

By the time he got his shoes back on, the two Japanese were gone. It was about dark, and there was thick shrubbery in the park.

Stone went on toward his destination. There did not seem to be much else to do.

THE place was supposed to be a tobacco shop—at least, the sign said so—and probably some persons did not know any better, because the shop did sell tobacco.

Across the rear stood a row of telephone booths, and the one farthest back always bore a sign. It said:

OUT OF ORDER

Ed Stone entered the telephone booth, closed the door, and the light did not come on as it should have, making it very dark. He put both hands flat against the back of the booth, shoved up, then pushed, and the back of the booth became a door that swung open. Beyond was a carpeted corridor, lighted by a frosted bulb at the far end, with doors placed at intervals. It was quiet.

It was always quiet in these back rooms, even late at night when the gambling was in progress.

Stone opened one of the doors—it was a silent door—and stepped through and stood looking at his manager, Barney Ney.

He looked at Barney Ney distastefully.

He said, "You wouldn't be figuring the Japanese situation, Barney?"

Barney Ney was at the moment sticking a pen in the inkwell on his carved teakwood desk; and surprise made him jiggle the pen, upset the inkwell, send black worms of ink crawling across the desk-top. Ney leaned back and took a snowy flood of silk handkerchief from his breast pocket. He wiped his hands while he looked at Stone.

"What the hell you talking about?"

There was no liking for Stone in his tone, and Stone doubted that Ney ever liked anyone except himself.

"Japanese," Stone said. "A fat one and a thin one."

Barney Ney was an unnaturally handsome man. In his early days he had been on the stage, and something of a matinee idol, until one of his blackmail victims had made trouble. Later, he'd acted in silent movies—but a chorus girl had died under suspicious circumstances at one of his parties.

The chorus girl thing was the last time Ney had been in public trouble. The man had grown smart with age.

"You gone punch drunk, Ed?" Ney asked suddenly.

ED STONE went over and stood beside the desk. He was a hard tower of a man.

He said. "I take it you don't know anything about any Japanese situation."

"You take it right."

"I hoped so."

Ney shook his head. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Then it was mistaken identity."

"Mistaken what?"

"Skip it. They must have made a mistake."

Barney Ney went on wiping his hands carefully with his handkerchief, and Ed Stone watched him. Finally, Stone took in breath.

"What I really came about, Barney," he said, "was to tell you the final word."

Ney squinted at him, holding the handkerchief motionless. "Final word about what?"

"Our contract."

"Well?"

"This is the last fight you manage for me."

Ney showed white teeth in something not a smile.

"You quit, eh?"

Stone said, "I quit."

"Why?"

"Want it frank?"

"Why not?"

"Because of my notions about the kind of guy you are."

Barney Ney laughed harshly. "Maybe you better clear that remark, Stone!"

"Sure. Handling fighters is only one of your lines. You've got others, not so clean."

"For instance?"

"We won't go into it. It's not my business. Only you and I are washed up after tonight." Ed Stone looked at the other levelly. "My cut on tonight's fight is three thousand. I'd like it now."

"You'd like—— Oh, you would, eh?"

Stone said doggedly, "Three thousand. Now."

"Like hell——"

Stone cleared over the desk and grabbed the handkerchief which Ney had been fumbling, grabbed it with both hands. They fought for the small gun which the handkerchief had concealed.

Ney's chair upset and went spinning. The desk skidded and wrinkled up the rug. Ney was a vain man, always in physical trim; he was almost as large as Stone. But Stone got the gun, a derringer, small and shiny and double-barreled.

Stone threw the gun into the corner. Then he mauled Ney around until his fingers had felt of all the places where Ney might have a hidden weapon.

Stone slammed Ney against the wall. Ney bounced and sank to all fours, dazed.

Stone said, "We could have argued all evening, no doubt."

He counted three thousand dollars out of the cash box which Ney kept in the desk, put the money in his pocket.

"You see, I heard about the last fighter who quit you," he said.

Ed Stone walked out.

BARNEY NEY got his back pressed against the wall, and sliding his back up the wall as if on a track, lifted up on shaking legs. Blood crawled out of each of his nostrils. He stood trembling and listening until he was sure Ed Stone had left the building.

"Mauler!" he called.

The Montana Mauler came through a door to the left. The huge Mauler looked bigger now than he ever looked in the ring. His clothes fit him about as well as a suit could have been made to fit a bull off the Montana range. For publicity reasons, he wore red cowboy boots which made him look as if he stood in tomato cans, and a cowboy hat of tent proportions.

"It was all I could do a minute ago to keep outa here, pard," he said in his cowboy drawl.

"Ney said grimly, "Damn good thing you didn't come in!"

"I'll knock that hombre's block off tonight!" the Mauler announced.

Ney ignored that and lifted his voice. "Come in here, Roch!"

Referee Abel Roch was a long, red-faced man who affected a turtleneck sweater, tweed trousers and canvas sneakers. He looked as if he were dressed for roadwork, looked also as though he'd been bred on the Bowery.

But he spoke English like one of the lordship.

"Really, old chap," he said, "that was bally inconvenient."

Barney Ney stabbed a hand at the air. "You both heard what just happened!"

"Partner, I thought you said this Stone ranny was your pup," the Mauler muttered at Ney.

"He's nobody's pup, damn him!" Ney snapped.

Referee Abel Roch eyed Ney. "I say, old fellow, it might not have been a good idea to try to hold out his cut of the purse. What is a mere three thousand in this matter?"

Ney swore. "Those Japanese will knock him off before this is over with. Why pay out three thousand to a man who is the same as dead?"

The Montana Mauler tugged at one of his cauliflowered ears.

"You reckon this Stone hombre figures we set the Japs on 'im?" he asked, his cowboy accent heavy.

The Mauler had never been near Montana, and the only horse he'd ever ridden was a stuffed one in a photographer's studio.

Barney Ney said savagely, "I don't know what Stone figures!"

Referee Abel Roch rubbed his red face. "If Stone does figure we set the Japs on him, it may be bad. The chap has brains. He might bally well distress us."

"We had to give the Japs somebody!" Barney Ney snapped. "They were hot on our trail."

The Mauler nodded. "Sure as tootin'. When we telephoned the Japs a tip that this Stone gent was their buzzard, we made a smart move."

Referee Abel Roch reached over and patted the Mauler's beefy back.

"Not smart, old dear, if the Stone fellow starts looking around."

Referee Abel Roch's accent was not quite as fake as the Mauler's. At least, he had actually been to England; it was a necessary trip and he'd changed his name, had a plastic surgeon change his face, and acquired an accent, all before he thought it safe to come back home.

Barney Ney got up, went to the window and pulled the heavy drapes aside.

"We'd better fix Stone so he can't look around too much," he said.

He could see Ed Stone, far down the boulevard under a street light, walking away with long strides.

ED STONE jogged the last four blocks to his hotel room to loosen his muscles. He had trained finely for the Mauler fight because, whatever else might be said of the Mauler's character, the fellow was a bear in the ring.

Stone thought at first that it was a Japanese in his room.

It wasn't; it was a Chinaman. A plump, round Chinaman who looked as pleasant as a cupid. A Chinaman whose eyes were large and innocent behind magnifying spectacles. One who wore a serving man's clothes—white house coat, dark trousers, black sneakers.

Having opened the door for Stone, the Chinaman put both hands together over his stomach and bowed.

"Velly welcome," he said.

Stone looked at the innocent moon face.

"Who the hell are you?"

The Chinaman bowed again. The way he bowed reminded Stone of a range owl ducking at the mouth of a prairie dog hole.

"Valet."

"What?"

"Valet," the Oriental explained.

Stone took a step to the right, a step to the left, was able to see all of his hotel room. It was empty.

He saw that his gray tweed suit, the one he always wore to his fights—his lucky suit—was laid out neatly on the bed.

He said, "Who you kidding?"

"No kid."

"Who are you?"

The cherubic intruder put his hands together and executed his ducking-owl bow again.

"A man does not have name for each nail that holds his house together," he said meekly.

Stone stepped into the room and closed the door.

"What the blue blazes is this?"

"Me valet."

"Who hired you?"

"Me."

Stone said angrily, "Then unhire yourself!" He jammed his hands in his pockets and eyed the Chinaman. "On second thought, you talk. You tell what this is about!"

"Me valet. Much good."

Stone glared in exasperation. It didn't make sense. He was confused, and he did not want his mind disturbed before the Mauler fight. Time for the opening bell was an hour away now—the bout was the important thing.

He reached suddenly and the Chinaman was fast, but not fast enough, and Stone got his collar.

He said grimly, "I don't want a valet!"

Swinging the Chinaman around, Stone ran him out through the door, gave him the boot where he thought it would do the most good. The would-be valet kept going, on down the steps, rubbing the part of his anatomy that had been abused.

CHAPTER II.

BATS ARE BLIND.

THE fight had gone seven rounds. It was scheduled for fifteen. But Stone knew by now that it would never go much more than seven.

Ed Stone was almost blind.

The *Arena* was a vast black cave full of smoke, noise, stink. In the center the floodlights blazed a white funnel on the ring, and around the ring, typewriters were still, but a telegraph sounder clattered and a radio fight commentator was talking into his microphone with strangled haste.

In the ring, Ed Stone jabbed, feinted and weaved, fighting the Montana Mauler. All the first six rounds had gone, and about a minute of the seventh.

Ed Stone's blindness was getting worse.

The Mauler was only a blurred shape in front of him, a foggy bulk that he kept off with flicking lefts. A shape that changed—tall—short—wide—narrow, as the Mauler tried to finish him. This Mauler had a dynamite left, like they'd said. It had the kick of a cowpony of the Montana ranges that the Mauler had never seen.

Now the left kicked Ed Stone's jaw. Whistle, impact and crash. Stone slapped the floor with his feet to keep erect as he went sidewise. When he collided blindly with a figure, he wrapped both arms around it and held.

He was not holding the Mauler—clothes on the figure told him so. The referee. It must be the referee.

The referee was Abel Roch.

Stone grated, "Maybe you're not in this! Only I think different!"

Rage was over him like red ants.

He muzzled Abel Roch with his blind face, got the official's jaw located. Then riffed his right. The blow landed squarely. It seemed that he could feel the man's teeth even through the padded glove. Abel Roch went down, slamming the canvas-covered ring floor, jarring Stone's shoe soles.

Stone covered up and crouched. He doubled very low, trying to hear whistle of the Mauler's fighting shoes on the resined canvas. Bawling of the crowd drowned all sound.

"Blind!" Stone said thickly. "Blind as a bat!"

Stone had long arms, a long thick body, thin hips and good legs. In the ring, he was a big man of sunburned marble, with a coating of sweat. Stone had a champion's body, even if now and then a sport writer did say he'd never be champ because he fought too much with his head. To be champ, you had to fight by instinct—according to the sport writers. Maybe in the old days, yes. But not today. However, it looked good in print.

Stone was not tired. He was just blind.

The blindness was much worse; his gloves were hardly dark splotches in a void. He crouched lower, straining his ears for whisking sounds of the Mauler's shoes. He could not hear them. He could only hear the crowd screaming for the kill.

The crowd didn't know why he was blind.

Chemicals. Chemicals that looked like ring resin—that was what had blinded him.

Chemicals on the Montana Mauler's gloves. He knew it by now, but the knowledge was too late to do much good.

Suddenly—whistle, impact, crash and black end to things.

WHEN they took the bandages off Ed Stone's eyes, he lay still for minutes and looked around. He was in a hospital room where there was a white bed, a white night table and other white furniture, and two nurses in white and a doctor in a neat blue suit.

There were flowers on the table, an enormous cluster of flowers, the most delightfully colorful blossoms Stone believed he had ever seen. He examined each thing in the room for a long time, enjoying to the fullest the sight of it, and looked at the flowers most of all.

"How long have I been here?"

"Two days," the doctor said.

Stone, nodding slowly, said, "Time is a funny thing. It seemed longer."

He turned his face toward the flowers and lay watching them, getting from the flowers a thrill that he had never gotten from anything before. It was so good to be able to see such beautiful things, and he knew suddenly that from now on, forever, he would like flowers.

He reached out and touched the flowers. "Who sent these?"

A nurse said, "Your valet."

"Who?"

"Your valet."

"I haven't got a valet."

"All I know," the nurse said, "is that he said so."

Stone asked, "Was he a Chinaman who looked like cupid?"

The nurse nodded.

"I still haven't got a valet," Stone said.

There was silence in the hospital room, except for the tiny whirring of an electric clock and louder ticking of a watch on the doctor's wrist.

"Did my manager try to see me?"

"What name?"

"Barney Ney."

"No," the nurse said. "No one by that name called."

"Did anybody call?"

"Two Japanese."

"A thin one and a wide one?"

"Yes."

"What did they want?" Stone asked.

"They merely seemed curious about when you would be out."

Stone smiled, and the smile felt strange, as though his face had been burned and was healing.

"I seem to have friends," he said grimly.

The doctor was wearing glasses. He took them off, put them in a case and closed the case with a loud snap.

"Lucky for you, Stone, that we learned what chemical blinded you. Knowing that, we were able to save your eyes. You can thank your valet for that."

"My valet?"

"Your valet told us the name of the chemical that blinded you."

Stone lay there and thought about that until he was more thoroughly confused, if that were possible.

"Am I all right now?" he asked.

"You'd better stay in bed a few days."

Stone got up and looked in the mirror. His face was brown around the eyes, as though it had been burned. The eyes themselves did not look as bad as he had feared.

He had a long face with plenty of jaw and mouth. Two years ago, when his nose had been broken, it had rather helped his appearance, the nose having been too big anyway. It was not a bad face, considering that it was a fighter's face.

"My clothes," he requested.

The doctor shook his head, began, "It'll be better for you to stay here——"

"I'll come back," Stone said, "when I've satisfied my curiosity."

"But——"

"My clothes!"

THERE was a town car standing at the curb in front of the hospital. It pulled up to the sidewalk to wait for Stone.

Stone started to get in the rear seat, then changed his mind and got in with the driver.

"Wrong place," the driver explained. "You supposed to ride in back."

"I know it," Stone said.

The driver shrugged, put the car into motion and turned right into the park which fronted the hospital. The machine rolled quietly on smooth pavement.

Stone looked at the green grass, the pleasant trees, the colorful flowers.

"Thanks," he said.

"Eh?"

"A man who is blind a couple of days begins to appreciate eyesight." The driver bowed, bobbing his head like an owl.

Stone asked, "How'd you get wise to the chemical the Mauler had on his gloves?"

"I not like three monkeys that sit in row."

"What three monkeys?"

"One no look. One no hear. One no talk."

"You're different, eh?"

The car was quiet, rode like a good car. It was long, heavy, no doubt powerful; while not a new car, it was so scrupulously polished that Stone only now began to realize that the machine might be several years old. It was a foreign make, which made it difficult to tell the age from the model.

"Whose car?" he asked.

"Yours."

Stone stared. "Eh?"

"You have money in pocket," the valet explained blandly. "So we buy automobile. Much nice, eh?"

Stone yelled, "You took Barney Ney's three thousand and blew it in on a town car!"

"Yes."

"What was the idea?"

"This lowly one always want to drive such a fine automobile," the Chinaman explained blandly.

Ed Stone reached over suddenly, jerked on the brake, switched off the motor and the town car stopped. He growled, "Now start talking!"

"You angry?"

"I'm angry as all get-out!" Stone said. "You've no idea how angry I get over three thousand dollars."

The Chinaman sighed.

"Rage is an impatient tiger. And I fear in this case it has a bell on its tail."

"What do you mean—bell on its tail?"

"Men who follow in car"—the Celestial pointed at the rear-view window—"are plainly visible."

They were plainly visible when Stone looked. Plainly audible as well. Or the loud crash of a gun was audible—then the bang-whistle as a tire let loose.

The Chinaman looked disgusted. "They not need do that!" he said indignantly.

THE bullet, of course, had let air out of Stone's tire to prevent their taking flight in the town car. And possibly also to impress them. It was not a bad shot; in fact, it was such a good shot that Stone spoke instantly.

"Barney Ney!" he said.

Barney Ney, in his younger days as a silent movie actor, had played leads in Westerns, and taken his work seriously enough to practice until he was a crack six-gun shot. Once Ney had told Stone he'd traveled with a circus one summer as a trick shot artist.

Stone looked, saw it was Barney Ney.

It was Barney Ney, the Montana Mauler and Referee Abel Roch, all with guns in hand—except the Mauler, who was driving. The Montana Mauler had swapped his cowboy hat for a chauffeur's cap.

Barney Ney said, "In here with us, you two!"

There was something in Ney's face. Something that was not ferocity. Stone tried to figure what it was.

Referee Abel Roch's hand was shaking. His gun barrel, resting on the door of the other car, made audible knocking sounds.

"We're not kiddin'!" Barney Ney yelled.

Stone got it now. Barney Ney was terrified.

Ney pointed at the Chinaman. "Where'd you collect this?"

Stone eyed the Oriental cherub. "Where did I?"

"Get in here—both of you!" Ney yelled.

Stone entered the other machine, and the Chinaman followed. The other car was a sedan with jump seats in the rear, and Stone and Tong sat on these, and Barney Ney and Referee Abel Roch sat facing them, guns threatening. Then the car took off with a jump that nearly slid Ney and Roch onto the floor.

Ney said angrily, "You damned fool!"

The Mauler growled, "Keep your shirt on. The clutch grabs."

The Mauler reached down and picked up a suitcase which had fallen from the front seat to the floorboards. He put the suitcase back on the seat.

The car rolled north until it was out of town and kept going. Barney Ney and Abel Roch spread their legs apart to brace themselves, but hardly moved their eyes or guns. Their breathing was not regular, and they perspired.

Sitting facing the rear, Ney and Roch could look through the back window of the car. One or the other watched the window almost continuously. As time passed, they seemed to grow more relieved.

Later, woods pressed in around the car, trees that were stubby and thick, and branches raked the top and sides of the machine. The wheels jumped into ruts and climbed out. Brush currycombed the undersides of the car. The Mauler had some trouble keeping the suitcase on the seat.

The car stopped at a cabin.

CHAPTER III.

VARIOUS TIGERS.

THE cabin was made of real logs, not the imitation kind called "log-siding." It was not a large cabin, nor new, but it appeared solid enough to be a blockhouse from which to fight Indians.

The Mauler got out, took a gun from under his belt. The gun was a single-action six-shooter with pearl grips, as phony a cowboy piece as the Mauler's dude ranch clothes and the "pards" and "rannies" in his conversation.

Barney Ney had sweated through the armpits of his neat, expensive suit. Referee Abel Roch's legs were cramped, and after he got out of the car he staggered around grimacing and croaking, "A damned charley-horse!"

Stone and the Chinaman got out of the car.

"Inside," Barney Ney said.

"What about this?" The Mauler pointed at the suitcase.

"Let it stay there," Ney said. "Nobody's within miles."

The cabin had one room.

In the room there were old chairs, an old table, and other old, unused things.

There was a brand-new gasoline stove. The stove was a heater type, had a tank to be pumped up, a bail by which it could be carried around.

There was also a new wooden packing box heaping full of groceries, mostly canned goods.

Barney Ney said, "Search them!"

Referee Abel Roch frisked the Chinaman and found nothing.

"Who are you, anyhow?" Roch demanded.

The Chinaman looked bland, said nothing.

The Montana Mauler gripped the pockets of Stone's suit one after another and tore them all out and let them hang, ripped and empty.

Stone said grimly, "This suit cost me forty."

"A coffin and a funeral will cost you two hundred and fifty!" the Mauler said.

BARNEY NEY went to each of the cabin windows—there were three—and examined them closely. When he found a crack between the sash and frame of one window, he took out his large white handkerchief and stuffed this into the crack until he had made it airtight.

"We'll fix the door from outside," he said.

The Mauler looked at him stupidly. "Door?"

"The place has to be airtight, simple-wits."

"Oh!"

Ney ordered Stone, "Lie down! Roch, tie him."

Stone's mouth had gone dry, and whatever they had fed him for breakfast in the hospital felt as though it had turned into a dead cat in his stomach.

Ney yelled, "Lie down!"

Stone said, "You're going to tie us up, plug the room airtight and light that gasoline stove."

"Lie down!"

"Apparently you don't want to shoot us, so the devil with you!"

Barney Ney showed his teeth. "Damn you, *I told you to lie down!*"

Stone said thickly, "Gasoline stoves in airtight rooms asphyxiate people! You're rigging a kill!"

Barney Ney beckoned the Mauler. "Can you knock this cluck out?"

"I did it in the ring, didn't I?" the Mauler growled.

"Do it now."

The Montana Mauler, as obedient as a big trained bulldog, squared off in front of Stone and dropped his shoulder the way he always did before he shot a left. The next instant, the Mauler was flat on his back on the floor. Stone shuffled his feet a little to regain his balance after exploding the right on the Mauler's jaw.

The Mauler rolled over, tried to get up, and made it as far as hands and knees. He was so dazed that he instinctively waited for a count of nine before coming the rest of the way to his feet.

Barney Ney yelled, "The way you telegraph that left, simple, you might as well wave flags!"

Then there were sparks inside Ed Stone's head.

ABEL ROCH had struck a blow from behind—Stone knew that. He did not go entirely unconscious, but he was too rattled to help himself. Roch had a rope ready. He tied Stone.

The Chinaman had started sidling toward the door, but Barney Ney snarled, pointed his gun, and the Celestial stopped. The Chinaman was also seized and bound.

Stone and the Chinaman were thrown across the table and lashed to it with many turns of rope. Once, the Montana Mauler went to the car and got more rope. Later, he slugged Stone a few times in places that hurt most.

"Light the stove!" Ney ordered.

It took the Mauler all of five minutes to get the stove going.

"Now we leave 'em."

They left Stone and the Chinaman tied to the table.

The gasoline stove had been turned high. It hissed and gave off fumes.

Stone floundered as much as the ropes permitted, upset the table to which he and the Chinaman were lashed, but made no progress toward getting free.

He saw Barney Ney look through a window to satisfy himself that they were still tied to the table.

Stone said, "They're sticking around."

The cherubic Chinaman said nothing. He was biting at a rope, but having no luck.

"After the stove uses all the oxygen, and we're asphyxiated, they can come back in and untie us," Stone continued. "Makes it look like an accident."

The Oriental fell to looking at something upon which the box of groceries stood.

"There are tigers inside and outside," Tong muttered.

"Tigers?"

The Chinaman sighed.

"They took something which did not belong to them," he said. "It was in a rose-colored box of iron. Then they became afraid of the men whom they had robbed. They became very afraid. So they telephoned these men they feared and told them it was you who had taken the iron box."

Stone digested that. The stove hissed steadily.

"They put the Japanese on me, eh?" he growled.

"Then they were afraid of you. So they tried to blind you. But that failed."

Stone said, "Now they're trying to kill us. Why?"

"To put an end to the trail."

"Eh?"

"You are the trail," the Chinaman explained gloomily. "If you are found dead, Japanese will think you hid what was in the rose box, and took secret with you when you died. Thus the trail ends."

STONE said, "The Japanese are what?"

"They are private detectives hired to find war collection."

"Now what was stolen?" Stone demanded.

"Money to buy fighting airplanes to use in war against China," Tong explained.

Stone thought it over. The Chinaman's way of explaining things was roundabout and needed straightening out in one's mind.

Japanese living in America were always taking up some kind of a collection to buy war equipment to help their homeland. It appeared that Barney Ney, Roch and the Mauler had stolen such a collection, and Japanese detectives had gotten hot on the trail. To mislead the Japs, Stone and the Chinaman were being framed for the theft, and killed before anything could go wrong with the frame-up.

The stove was giving out heat, and it was becoming a little hard to breathe in enough air.

The Chinaman was looking at the object under the box of groceries.

"What do you see?" Stone demanded.

"The other tiger," the Celestial explained.

Stone leaned over, stared, and saw a metal box that was rose-colored and secured with a shiny brass lock.

"The Japanese war-collection box?"

The Chinaman nodded gravely. "It has no stripes," he said gloomily, "but it is still a tiger. It will make us appear guilty."

Stone said, "Where do you hook into this?"

The Chinaman registered innocence.

"Me valet."

"You're a liar, too, aren't you?"

The Chinaman continued to stare at the rose-colored collection box. The box must be empty, of course. But it would serve, when the Japanese found them—and Barney Ney surely intended for the Japanese to find them after they were dead—to fasten guilt upon them. The Japanese would consider them the thieves, and hunt no farther.

Hissing of the gasoline stove was snakelike.

STONE said, "We might get the corner of the table against the stove and set it on fire."

"They will then move us," the Chinaman said pessimistically.

"At least, they'll let fresh air in when they come."

They squirmed, wriggled, and got the table nearer the stove an inch at a time. It was impossible to get any of the ropes near the flame. But they did get the table corner into the fire.

The table began to smoke and char. It was not, Stone saw with a sinking feeling, going to burn.

"Lie still and see what happens," he groaned.

They waited—ages, it seemed. The table corner smoked, smoldered, and the room filled with pale smoke.

Barney Ney looked in through the windows and saw the smoke. He began swearing.

Stone whispered, "We've fainted!"

The Chinaman got the ruse. He became slack and closed his eyes. Stone did likewise.

The door smashed open and Ney and the Mauler came galloping inside.

The Mauler shook the slack figures tied to the table.

"They've throwed a joe!" he growled.

Ney snarled, "Get 'em loose. We'll tie 'em to somethin' else."

"What's wrong with the table?"

"The way it's burned, we'll have to carry it off in the brush somewhere," Ney gritted. "Can't have anybody gettin' suspicious."

The ropes came loose as the Mauler cut them. From a slitted eye, Stone saw Barney Ney holding his gun ready.

Stone groaned a little, drew his knees against his chest. He made fish-out-of-water motions with his mouth. He did not open his eyes, and he remained doubled up.

When the Mauler began tying Stone's ankles again, Stone kicked. He was doubled, all set for the kick. He put everything into it.

The Mauler went tumbling against Barney Ney's ankles. Ney staggered. Stone came up. But the Chinaman was up, too. The cherubic Chinese was fast, and he hit Ney like a small lemon-colored spider tackling a big fly. They went to the floor.

Stone landed on the Mauler. There was no time for blows. The Mauler's gun—Stone had to get that. He did fasten his hands to it, and they struggled. The Mauler was heavier, probably had more brute strength than Stone. Stone pounded the Mauler's hands against the hard floorboards.

Then Referee Abel Roch came in.

He came backing in, with his hands over his head.

Two Japanese detectives, the fat one and the thin one, were following him with guns.

STONE thought quickly. He wanted none of this, hadn't wanted any of it from the first, and he saw there was no time to argue with the Japanese.

Stone hissed in the Mauler's ear.

"They'll kill all of us!" he rapped.

When the Mauler's one-track mind had shifted to the Japanese, Stone released him and leaped back. The Mauler pointed his gun at the Japanese.

A Japanese screamed at him. Excitement made the Nipponese scream in his own tongue—probably if he had yelled in English, things might have happened differently. As it was, the Mauler instantly shot the Japanese in the stomach.

After that the room was full of crashing powder noise.

The Japanese the Mauler shot sat down, holding his gun with both hands. Then he shot the Mauler. The Mauler began coughing through his clenched teeth, blowing out blood with each cough.

Abel Roch jumped to one side and got his gun out. The other Japanese fired at him. Roch then began turning around and around while he fumbled for his gun.

The Chinaman got away from Barney Ney.

Ney started for his gun. The Nipponese shot Ney. Ney kept going, got his gun and fired. The Japanese went back, jumping three or four inches off the floor. His forehead had seemed to split.

Barney Ney turned quickly for the other Nipponese, the one with the bullet in the stomach.

Stone kicked the table, sent it turning over and over across the floor. The table hit Ney, unbalanced him. The wounded Japanese detective fired three times. Ney's back was to Stone, and Stone saw three small ragged volcanic cones appear in the back of Ney's neat suit and erupt red liquid. Ney folded down, dead instantly.

The wounded Japanese turned and shot the revolving Roch, who stopped turning and fell.

Then the Japanese put his gun carefully on the floor, wrapped his midriff with both arms, and slowly straightened out on the floor, becoming quite motionless at about the same time that the Mauler stopped coughing scarlet fluid through his clenched teeth.

Stone got up and took one of the guns. He watched everybody for a long time.

The Chinaman sidled out of the room.

Stone wiped his fingerprints off the gun he had been holding. He put the gun on the floor. He wiped the table to which they had been tied, scrubbing each part of the table where they might have left their fingerprints.

When he finished that, he realized the Chinaman was gone.

Stone leaped out of the cabin.

The Chinaman was running down the lane. He had a good two hundred yards start, and was going fast.

The Chinaman carried the leather suitcase from Ney's car. The case appeared to have jounced open, for he was having trouble with it, holding it shut with both arms as he ran.

Stone said, "So Barney Ney had the Japanese collection in the suitcase!"

He wiped his fingerprints off Ney's car before he left.

STONE awakened in his hotel room the next morning with a headache, with his eyes hurting a little, and swung his legs off the bed—then looked in surprise at the tray holding breakfast, which stood beside his bed. He had not ordered breakfast.

Neither had he ordered the newspaper which was folded beside the coffee cup.

Stone read the headlines.

FIGHTER, REFEREE, MANAGER
ARE SHOT
JAPANESE DETECTIVES SLAIN

There was a long story. Stone did not find his name in it anywhere.

In the back of the newspaper there was another smaller story, one with a single headline.

UNKNOWN CHINESE PATRIOT
DONATES

The hospital fund for aiding Chinese war victims today received an anonymous gift reported to be in excess of one hundred thousand dollars.

Ed Stone put down the paper.

"Hey, valet!" he yelled suddenly.

Tong appeared promptly in the doorway. This morning he was cherubic in sateen trousers and sateen shirt that was outside his trousers.

Stone said, "So you're going to keep on haunting me?"

"Me good valet," the Chinaman said meekly.

Stone shook his head.

"You're probably a better Chinese patriot."

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Certified Cremo
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50% more pleasure for your cigar money
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CIGARS
FORMERLY 5¢ - NOW 3 FOR 10¢

TRACED TO MURDER

Jeff Patrick's business wasn't murder, but he got mixed up in it when he investigated the family of fakes!

By Norman A. Daniels

CHAPTER I.

COLLECTED IN FULL.

THE sign on the door read: "TRACER SERVICE, INC."

It didn't mean much to the average man and Monte Brant was just that. So he asked questions of the young, alert-looking person behind the desk inside that office.

"You find people, don't you?" he asked.

Jeff Patrick agreed with a vigorous nod. "We find 'em and keep the job confidential," he said. "Whether the guy owes you money, is trying to beat an insurance company, pulling a fade-out on a business deal—anything."

"Then," Monte Brant said, "I've got a job for you. Find my father's butler."

Jeff Patrick's feet came off the desk with a thump. He half stood up and leaned over the desk.

"Listen, wise-guy, if it's amusement you want, go see a funny movie and let me alone."

"I mean it," Monte Brant said. "Dad's butler vanished three days ago. You'd think from that we are a wealthy family, but don't get me wrong. Dad used to have lots of money, but he lost it. Jenkins—he's the butler—has stayed on because he has no other place to go. He's more like a—a friend than a servant, and there must be a reason for his disappearance."

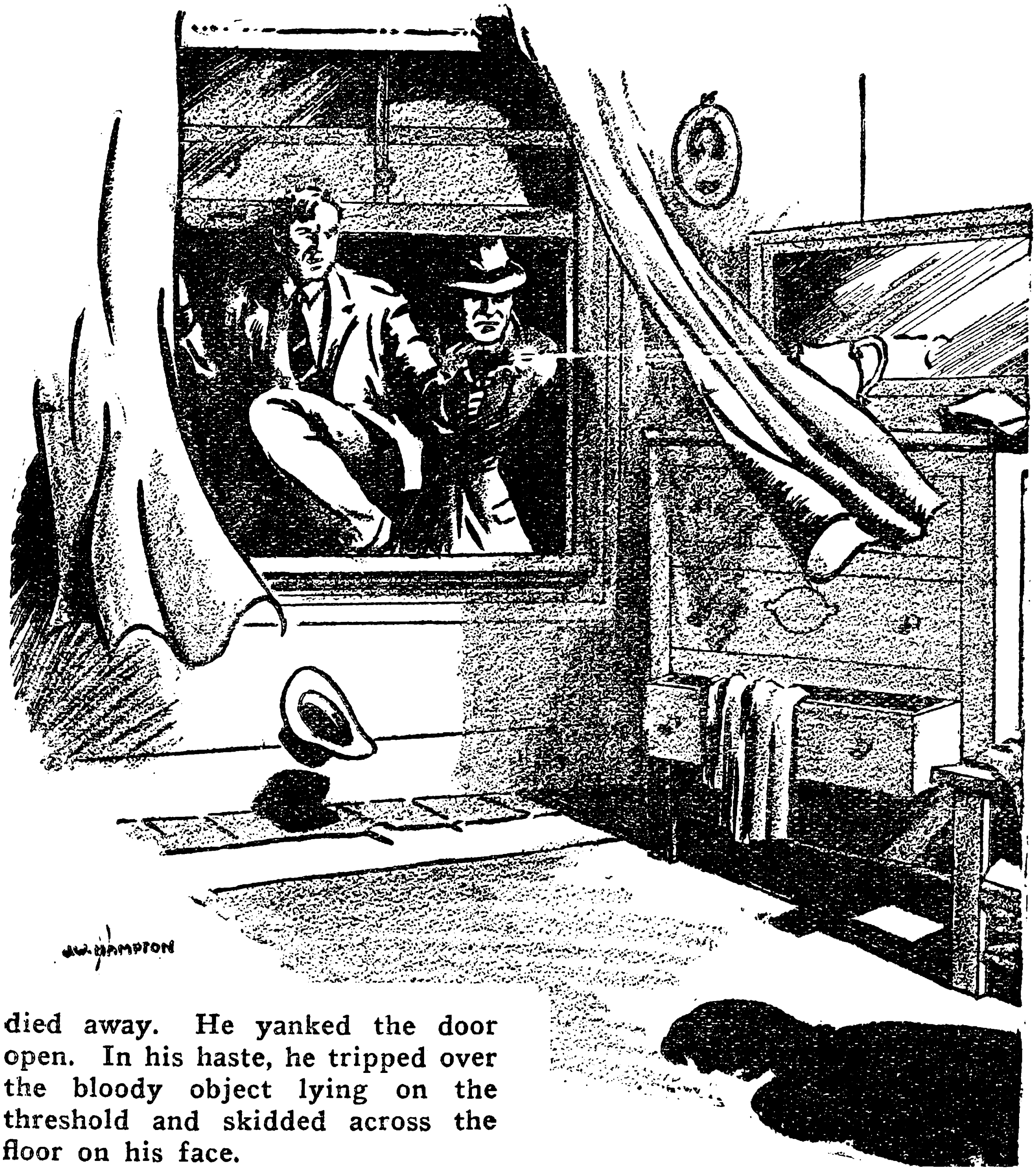
"It's best to start the search at your house," Jeff Patrick suggested.

"Great," Brant said. "Poor Jenkins hasn't a friend or relative alive. I'll write down the address. When will you get there?"

"In a couple of hours," Jeff said. "You can't let these kind of cases grow cold. You'll be home, eh? And your father, too?"

Brant said yes and headed for the door. He waved a cheerful salute to Jeff and stepped out. The door closed with a bang and a second later that same sound was repeated, but increased manyfold.

Jeff Patrick was out of his chair, around the desk and at the door before the echo of the single shot had



died away. He yanked the door open. In his haste, he tripped over the bloody object lying on the threshold and skidded across the floor on his face.

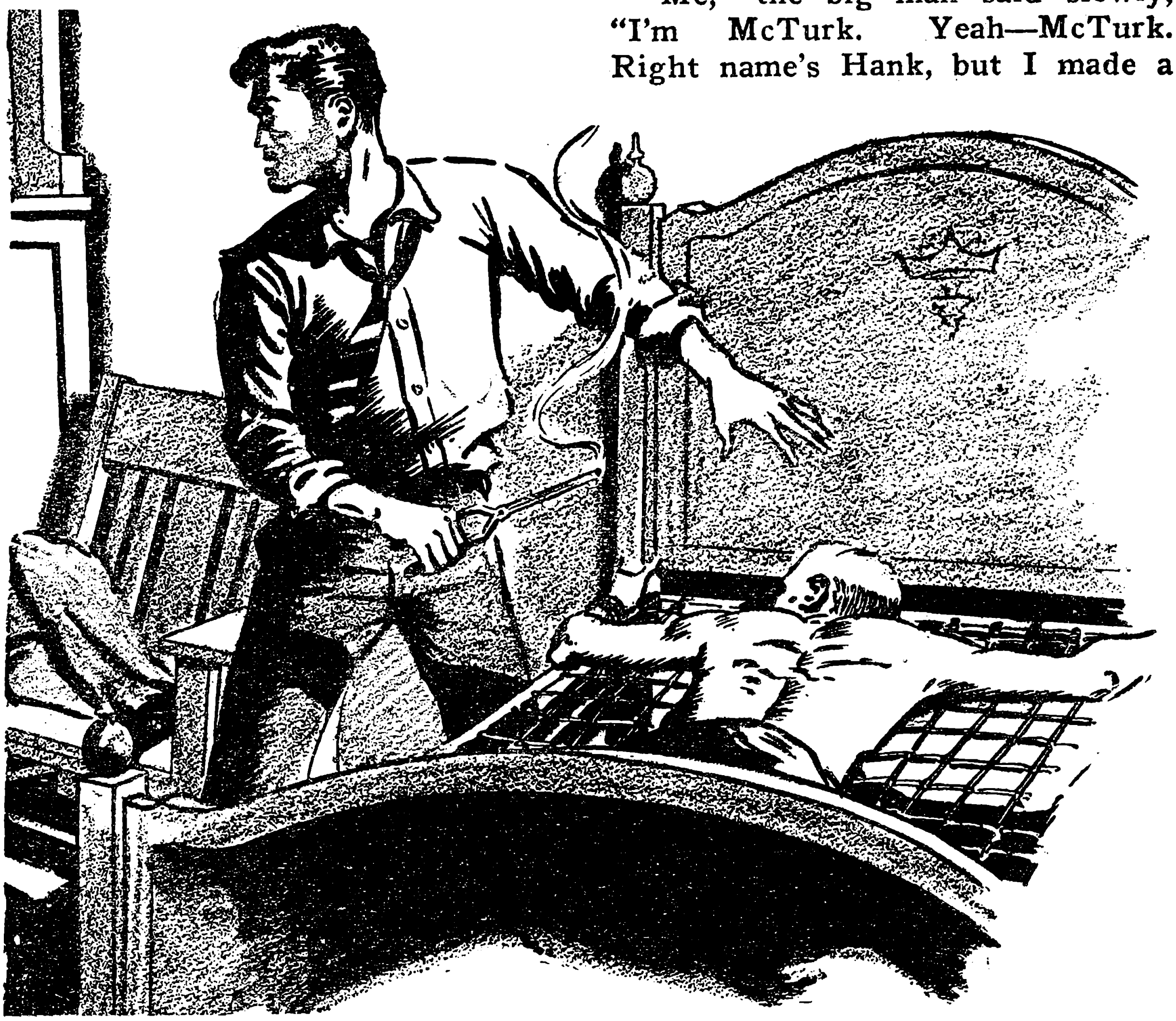
Up quickly, he reached in his hip pocket and slid a gun out of a spring holster. A man was running toward the elevator. He got in as Jeff snapped a shot and began running toward the lift.

But he was too late. Evidently the elevator operator had been disposed of, for the lift dropped fast. Jeff made a line for the stairway. He pushed open the swinging door and hit a burly man head-on. The force of the impact sent Jeff backward and into an ignoble position on the floor. His gun came up and covered the man.

"All right," he snapped. "Maybe you're not in with those killers, but I'm taking no chances. Reach!"

THE stranger was huge. A least six feet two and his weight must have been in the vicinity of two-sixty or seventy. He raised his arms shoulder high and said in a deep, slow voice: “Better I should ’a’ stayed away from here, I guess.”

“You guess?” Jeff snorted. “Who the hell are you and what do you want? No—don’t answer. It’ll take you a week. There’s a dead man over there against my door. Anyway, I think he’s dead. Guys don’t live with a bullet smack through the middle of their face.”



The thug . . . a curling iron smoking slightly in his hand . . . spun around.

Jeff hurried to the man slumped in front of his office door. It didn’t take him long to make the identification. Monte Brant may have lost his butler before he entered the office, but as he left, he had lost—his life. Someone popped into the hallway and screamed. Somebody else began yelling into a telephone for the police. Jeff Patrick wiped his face and turned to the big man into whom he’d collided.

“Now you,” he snapped. “What’s it all about? Looking for somebody or are you just a dumb stooge working for the killer?”

“Me,” the big man said slowly, “I’m McTurk. Yeah—McTurk. Right name’s Hank, but I made a mistake in spellin’ it once and they been callin’ me Hunk. Yeah—Hunk McTurk.”

Jeff Patrick didn’t know whether to laugh or swear. “Hunk McTurk,” he groaned. “Okay, brother, you must be innocent. Nobody with a pan like yours could help a murderer. See anyone going down them stairs?”

“Not me,” “Hunk” answered. “No, sir. I wanted to ride up, but the dog-gone elevator wouldn't come down when I pushed the button. So I says to myself, maybe it's on the bum and I starts to walk. I'm lookin' for a guy named Tracer, Incorporated."

"You would be!" Jeff Patrick said and knelt beside the body. "That's always my kind of luck. What do you want?—and don't mind me if I look this guy over."

"A job. Yeah—a job. You run some kind of a find-a-missing-guy agency, don't you? Well—me—I got experience."

But Jeff was too busy to pay much attention. Monte Brant had been killed with one bullet. Killed instantly. That the murder was deliberate, was quite evident from the nature of the wound. The killer must have aimed well and steadily. The inside pocket of Brant's topcoat was ripped away. His wrist watch was pulled far down on his wrist, as though the killer had tried to yank it free.

"Maybe the guy who bumped you meant the job to look like a stick-up," Jeff Patrick told the dead man. "But it's no go. The hallway of a business building is one hell of a spot to roll a guy, much less plug him."

The elevator came up and stopped with a jerk. It disgorged half a dozen important-acting men. The elevator operator nursed a bloody, swollen forehead and didn't pay much attention to what went on.

INSPECTOR HALLIGAN of the Homicide Squad bustled up to Jeff. He peered at him, snorted something and began to examine the corpse.

"Well," Halligan asked without looking up, "who did it, master mind?"

Jeff Patrick laughed. "I should worry about who did it when guys like you are paid to find out. The guy was in my office—wanted me to find his butler, whom he mislaid some place. He stepped out and bango!—he was dead."

Inspector Halligan got up lumberingly. He shoved his hat to the back of his head and rolled a wad of chewing gum into a position for easier speech. He said:

"So he lost his butler, huh? Listen, Patrick, I'm the law, see? I got to find me this killer and I got ideas you know who he is. Now start talking or——" Halligan stopped short. His beady eyes rested on Hunk McTurk's placid face. "Well for—— McTurk, what the hell you doing here?"

Hunk shrugged his big shoulders. "I had to find me a job, didn't I? I was gonna see this Mr. Tracer, Incorporated—when I finds this stiff. Better I——"

Halligan waved his hands. "Yeah, I know—better you should 'a' stayed home. And how!"

Jeff Patrick eyed the big man, faced Halligan and asked: "Just who is this guy?"

Halligan wrinkled his nose. "Until this morning, he was a cop. No fooling, he got on the dicks somehow or other. But the chief sent him downtown to arrest a clerk in Townsend's office. You know Townsend, the biggest corporation lawyer in town? Well, Hunk brings back Townsend himself and lands him in the clink. Imagine! To save his own face, the commissioner ordered Hunk here sacked."

Hunk McTurk grinned and his huge face seemed to break in half. "Sure. Thanks, Halligan, for explainin' it. But hell! I just got the two guys' names mixed up a little. Sometimes I think it would 'a' been——"

Jeff Patrick and Inspector Halligan chorused the rest of it—"better you should 'a' stayed home!"

Jeff added: "No jobs, big boy. Sorry—can't use you. But you can park in the office if you want to."

Halligan took the name and address of the dead man, wrote it down and solved the crime on the spot, announcing:

"Murdered by a stick-up guy who lost his nerve and shot. Couldn't even get the guy's wrist watch off. How's business, Jeff?"

Jeff said, "Lousy," and went back into the office. Hunk sat on one of the straight-back chairs and Jeff looked twice to see that the legs were still in line. Hunk swarmed all over the chair and half of him hung off uncomfortably. But he chewed a match with all the calmness of a man out of a job and who didn't give a damn.

JEFF sat down behind the desk. Halligan, he decided, was all wet. Monte Brant hadn't been murdered for what money he carried. There was something far more sinister than that behind it. Jeff Patrick didn't handle murder cases unless they happened in due course of his running down vanished persons. But Brant had seemed like a nice kid—worried about the butler, too, and only a decent guy would do that.

"You got no job, huh?" Hunk broke Jeff's reverie. "Me—I'll work for coffee and cake. I can drive pretty good. Had a accident couple o' days ago. Hit a truck, but wasn't my fault. The truck wasn't supposed to be in front o' me. Like I told Halligan—better I should 'a' steered outa the way maybe. But hell—that was the truck driver's job."

Jeff threw up his hands. "Stick around if you want to. I need a guy to answer the phone—if it ever rings. Stay here. I'm going down to the dead man's home. There's something screwy about that kill and I'm going to find out what it is."

Hunk got up slowly. "How much is the pay?" he asked.

Jeff snorted: "What pay? I said you could hang around, that's all."

"Then," Hunk announced, "better I should go along, huh? No use stayin here when nobody ever comes in. Me—I like action."

Jeff Patrick gave up. Hunk trailed after him to the elevator, got into Jeff's light coupé and made every spring screech with alarm. Jeff weeded his way through the traffic, heading uptown.

Monte Brant's home was seedy-looking, but had been a mansion in its day. A light burned on the first floor only. Jeff rang the bell and wondered what kind of fool he was. Now he'd have to break the news, and he hated that plenty.

A man of about fifty opened the door and stepped back, mostly in alarm at the bulk of Hunk McTurk, who loomed up like a mountain behind the slim figure of Jeff.

"You the father of Monte Brant?" Jeff asked.

The elderly man nodded quietly. "I am. Is there anything wrong?"

"He's dead." Jeff brought it out all at once. "He was murdered about an hour ago, right after he left my office."

"Monte—dead!" The man backed up and sat down in one of the ornate high-backed chairs in the hallway. He wiped his face and shook his head as if to dispel cobwebs. "You—are certain?"

"Positive," Jeff said. "He dropped in to retain me to look for a missing butler. When he left the office, somebody shot him down. He died instantly."

Harrison Brant rubbed his face

some more. "Come in," he said in a tired voice. "I—I've been afraid of this for weeks. Monte laughed at me, but—I had a premonition. You see, Monte had a bad habit. He—he gambled and—well, he didn't have the money to meet his debts. They must have—collected in full."

CHAPTER II.

WILLING PRISONER.

HARRISON BRANT felt better after he consumed a weak highball. He talked rationally and gave Jeff facts.

"The butler has disappeared, but that's insignificant to Monte's death. You can find Jenkins if you wish. I—I'm afraid I can't pay you much now. Will the police be here soon?"

Jeff nodded. "They're late now. Listen, Mr. Brant, Monte looked like a good guy. If he was taken for a sleigh ride by a bunch of cardsharps, give me the chance of bringing them to the chair. Where did he gamble? Who hooked him? The butler can wait until we clean up Monte's death."

Harrison Brant sighed. "There's a man named Keller. He runs some kind of a place downtown. Monte lost ten thousand there last week and couldn't pay up. Keller must be the man. He hired the murderer, at any rate."

Jeff stood up. "Good. I'll see Keller before the cops reach him. If he paid anybody to kill your son, I'll drag him in, and the torpedo, too. After that's over, I'll find your butler. Hey, Hunk—come on. We're going places and maybe you'll come in handy at that, if there happens to be any of those steel doors to bust down at the gambling place."

Jeff was driving away when a department car pulled up. He stepped on the gas. It would take Halligan an hour to digest Harrison Brant's information. Jeff wanted to have the killer booked by that time.

He parked a block away from a Neon sign that flashed in crimson light the name: "RED HEART CLUB."

"Looks like St. Valentine's day, huh?" Hunk observed sagely.

Jeff snickered and turned into the ornate night club. He knew that the dance floor out front masked the real purpose of the club. Keller ran a fancy gambling joint—ran it well, too; for those who complained that they were cheated found themselves in a sound-proof room with a couple of Keller's torpedoes. Usually, they changed the squealer's mind about talking. If they didn't, large quantities of river water did.

They went in, unmolested. The dance floor was a third filled. Business seemed poor, but it was still early. Jeff walked briskly across the floor toward a stairway leading upward to a door daubed with gold paint. He rapped at this smartly, then blew on his knuckles. Steel doors have a tendency to be very hard.

A beefy-faced man looked out and tried to shut the door again. Hunk's huge shoulder hit the partly open door. There was a burglar chain holding it, but Hunk broke that off neatly. The doorman hurtled backward and cursed them, one hand resting against a hip pocket as he spoke. Jeff grinned, walked by the man and into a spacious office. There were four men inside. All jumped to their feet as he entered. Then they relaxed.

BEHIND the fancy-carved desk, Keller looked at Jeff with a smile. "We figured maybe it was a raid, Jeff. But instead of real cops, we get a phony like you. What's wrong now?"

"You know Monte Brant," Jeff said slowly. "He owes you money. Right?"

"Maybe," Keller shrugged. "Maybe not. Why?"

"Brant was murdered this afternoon—shot in the face by some gunman. You wouldn't know anything about it?"

"Me?" Keller barked. "Why should I? Say—you ain't accusing me of bumping the guy. Hell, I been in this place all day and night. A couple of hundred guys can tell you that——"

Jeff laughed. "You wouldn't do it yourself, Keller. Not you—with dough enough to slip some heel fifty bucks to do the job for you."

Someone came barging into the office. It was a skinny man with a slouch cap, seedy clothes and the pallor that goes with the continued night life such men as he lead.

"Hey, boss," he cried eagerly. "I did it! Like you said. It was a pipe. I——"

He seemed to notice Jeff and Hunk for the first time and he grew wide-eyed. He turned, started a beeline for the door, but Hunk's mighty arm shot out, grabbed him and tossed him bodily halfway across the room to a leather davenport.

"So you did it?" Jeff said curtly. "You killed a man, didn't you? You shot Monte Brant in the Weston Office Building?"

Some one crept up behind Jeff. An inverted gun butt started swinging downward, but Jeff had been expecting this. He ducked, came up with his right fist hurtling out ahead of him. It cracked against the gunman's chin, knocked him completely off his feet to crash against a chair It was a signal for the others. They made a concerted rush for Jeff.

No one paid much attention to Hunk McTurk. He remained close to the door and said nothing. But suddenly he kicked the door shut, carefully placed his hat on a chair and went into action. Two of the gunmen found themselves dangling in his grasp. He brought them together with a terrific impact, flung them away and calmy wiped his hands.

Jeff had Keller covered. The other crook, the thin, frightened one, was huddled in a corner. Jeff walked over to him.

"Stand up," he snapped. "I'm going to frisk you."

IN the man's hip pocket, Jeff found a .38 revolver. The private dick sniffed of the muzzle, opened the breech and grunted in satisfaction. One bullet had been recently fired.

"Okay, Keller," Jeff said quietly. "Looks like you're the goat. This heel murdered Monte Brant because the kid couldn't pay up the dough you cheated him out of. Which makes you an accessory."

"Prove it," Keller said with a grin. "Anyway, Patrick, you ain't got a right to put the pinch on me. You're no regular dick."

Someone banged on the door. Hunk got Jeff's nod and opened it. Inspector Halligan and three men burst in. They looked around in amazement.

"It's about time you got here," Jeff said. "Here's your killer, Halligan. The pasty-faced gent. He packed a rod that was fired not long ago. He came in and told Keller he did what he was told to do and got away with it."

Halligan snapped handcuffs over the thin man's wrists. "Listen, Patrick," he said, "you got no business horning in like this. You beat us to Brant's home, and now here. Why don't you stick to your own line? You find guys who disappear and we'll take care of the murderers. All right, boys—haul this rat out."

Keller got up and extended his hands. "Want to take me too, inspector? I'll go along with no fuss, but I warn you—if you can't prove this, I'll sue for plenty."

Halligan snorted: "I'm no sap. If we want to pick you up, that's easy. Your torpedo will talk with the right kind of treatment. When he does, I'll be back—for *you.* Meantime, don't run for it because I'll throw you in a cell if you do."

THEY all left the office. Jeff was left. He turned as he pulled the door closed. Keller stood behind the desk, grinning broadly and wiggling his fingers in a salute that was anything but respectful. Jeff frowned. The whole set-up looked crazy. Keller wasn't worried. The torpedo seemed to be enjoying himself. Keller's men hadn't put up any kind of a fight. They were all armed, yet never a shot had been fired.

"Hunk," he said as they got into the coupé, "I'm beginning to think we're running straight into a plant. That torpedo didn't act like a guy being pinched for murder."

"Yeah," Hunk said slowly, "Yeah—I wasn't thinkin' so much about that, but you see, yesterday—before I pulled that boner—I carted a couple o' guys to the jail house. Mostly that was what I did, the big shots figurin' nobody could bust away from me. Well, anyhow, that runt who Halligan just put the pinch on—he was in a cell on the island. I was tryin' to place the guy all the time, only it wouldn't come."

Jeff's foot banged on the brake. "You mean that guy was in jail as late as yesterday afternoon? What time, huh?"

Hunk looked blank. "Dunno—guess it was around five o'clock."

Jeff snapped his fingers. "Now I know it was a set-up. They don't dress men out of the island jail until four p. m. If that guy was there yesterday at five, he wouldn't have been let out until this afternoon at four. It would take him an hour to reach my office building. That makes it five o'clock before he could possibly have been there. Monte Brant was shot at three-fifteen. Stay with the car, Hunk, while I phone the jail and make sure."

Jeff was back in three minutes and speeding still farther downtown. He pulled up before a red brick building and got out. Hunk peered suspiciously at the entrance, saw a modest sign reading:

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
CITY MORGUE

"I guess maybe I'll stay in the car," he announced. "You goin' in that place?"

Jeff jumped out of the coupé. "Be back in two minutes," he said.

He identified himself to the clerk in charge and was led into the property department. Monte Brant's blood-smeared clothing was dumped on the counter in front of him. He brushed it aside and picked up the wrist watch. Eagerly, he pried open the back of it. The property clerk watched him narrowly. Jeff's thumbnail slid under a small photograph inserted in the back of the watch. Cleverly, he slipped it out without being detected. He handed the watch back and shrugged.

"Not a thing to help," he said. "Thanks, brother."

HE went back to the car. Hunk was smoking a cigar that stunk like burning cabbage leaves. Jeff wrinkled his nose and rolled down the windows.

"We're going to your old workshop, Hunk. Think you can get me into the cell room without Halligan knowing it?"

Hunk nodded solemnly. "Sure. The boys don't know I was busted yet. Anyhow, the guy who opens the door of the cell room owes me six bucks, as I was winner in a little game we had the other night. He'll let me in."

Hunk worked it magically. Jeff left him talking to the turnkey, arguing about six dollars and when it would be paid. Jeff stepped in front of the thin torpedo's cell and brushed his hand against the bars. The crook was lying down, but he sprang to his feet eagerly, peered out at Jeff and relaxed.

"Oh," he said, "I figured it was my mouthpiece! What do you want?"

"Not much," Jeff said lightly. "Just thought I'd drop in. Think you'll like going to the chair?"

The crook laughed harshly. "Me burn? Listen, wise-guy, they ain't got a thing on me, but just the same I ain't talkin', see? They won't put me on trial for three-four weeks yet, and I'm keepin' my tongue in my mouth. So you might as well scram outa here."

Jeff lit a cigarette and blew some of the smoke into the crook's face. "It's been known," he said quietly, "that some fall guys really do take the rap—even when they're stalling so the real killer can get away. I been hearing that Keller ain't so healthy these days. Now if he should suddenly pass out, where'd you be?"

"Right here," the crook grinned. "Nothing doin', nosey. You don't get me to talk."

Jeff shrugged. "Okay. Maybe you like it on the island. Wanting to go back there in such a rush proves it. See you later, sap."

He signaled Hunk and they left police headquarters via a side entrance. Jeff sat in the car studying the small photograph he had taken from Monte Brant's watch. The man and woman in the picture were about the same age, and both bore a resemblance to Monte.

Hunk pressed over to look. "Whatcha got?" he asked.

"This," Jeff said, "came from Monte's wrist watch. Remember how the killer tried to pull it off his wrist? He must have known Monte carried it. I came out too fast for him to get the watch loose and he left without it."

"What's a guy want with a picture?" Hunk wanted to know. "Hell, chief, I think you're runnin' around in circles, I do."

"You got the right idea, but the wrong man," Jeff grinned. "Halligan's the guy who is following his own tracks. We're going to see Monte's father again. I still haven't found the butler."

CHAPTER III.

GUN PLAY.

HARRISON BRANT didn't open the door to Jeff's ring. A man in quiet livery bowed slightly and let Jeff and Hunk enter. Jeff faced him.

"You Jenkins?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir," the man bowed again. "I'm Jenkins, sir. You wish the master? This way—if you please."

"Wait a minute," Jeff said. "Just where have you been, Jenkins? Monte Brant came to me, retained me to go out and find you."

Jenkins allowed a semblance of a smile to cross his face. "I'm very sorry, sir. I left without telling the master, but the fact was—my sister was very ill, sir. I went to see her. If I've been any trouble——"

"Not at all." Jeff waved his hand. "You saved me a job. Now I'll talk to Mr. Brant."

Brant was in the study. A stack of papers was on the desk in front of him and he was busy examining these. He looked up, a little startled.

"Oh," he said, "it's you! Glad you came. Of course you saw Jenkins. The man's getting on in years—must be when he goes off and forgets to tell me about it. I heard from Inspector Halligan. He tells me the murderer is rounded up already. As I told Halligan, it's remarkable what progress you police have made. Poor Monte isn't even buried yet and his murderer is behind bars. I—I'm sorry I haven't much capital. If I had, I'd certainly reward all of you."

Jeff brushed aside the suggestion. "I just came back to look for Jenkins. Now that he's here—well—I guess my work is done. There's no fee, Mr. Brant. I haven't done anything. Better warn Jenkins that if he goes away again, he'd better tell you first. His sister was sick, is that it?"

Brant nodded. "He's really greatly attached to that sister of his. I suppose worry made him forget to notify me. Thank you again for your help, Mr. Patrick. I'm deeply grateful."

They shook hands and Jeff walked out. Hunk was in the car, still puffing on the smelly cigar. He hurled the stub away and Jeff whistled in relief; but Hunk lit another two minutes later.

"Well," he observed, "I guess that's all, huh, chief? We gotta find us a new case to work on."

"We?" Jeff grunted. "I never hired you, Hunk. You're just good company, but you're as useless to me as an—an iceberg, right now. And stop calling me 'chief.'"

Hunk looked as though he'd been squashed. "You ain't got no job, huh? Better, maybe, I should 'a' never been a cop. Better I should 'a' stayed home, I guess."

JEFF turned north on a quiet avenue. It was late—well after midnight and traffic was thin. He paid no attention when a taxi pulled up beside him. But he jumped into action when he saw the side window roll down and the muzzle of a submachine gun glint in a street lamp.

"Duck!" Jeff yelled.

Hunk tried to scrooge his thick body farther down in the seat, but he was wedged there firmly. He reached under his coat, brought out a heavy Police Positive and without preamble started to shoot. He fired through the glass window and all. The taxi swerved crazily. The Tommy gun belched and the windshield fell into pieces.

Hunk clapped a hand to his shoulder and muttered a fervent curse. Jeff felt a piece of his cheek ripped away by one slug. His coupé careened from left to right, out of control. It climbed the curb, hit a wall with a rending crash and Jeff groaned.

The taxi was pulling away fast. The private dick saw a man's beady eyes peering back. Jeff slumped over the wheel, let his left hand hang out of the window limply and stayed that way until a panting patrolman came up.

The taxi had vanished around a corner. Jeff pushed open the door and jumped out while the patrolman gaped.

"I thought you was dead," the cop said. "You looked it—fallen over the wheel that way."

"Good!" Jeff said. "That's how I wanted to look. Hey, Hunk—— Hunk—oh, hell—he's passed out! Help me with him."

But Hunk was only slightly dazed. He had a wound in the fleshy part of his left arm and there was a furrow dug just above his left ear. He patted the wound tenderly and grimaced.

Jeff said: "That was close. Thanks to you, Hunk, we're alive. If you hadn't shot so fast, we'd be full of lead right now."

Hunk brightened. "Then I gets a job, huh?"

"No," Jeff said. He surveyed what was left of his car, sighed and signaled for a taxi. He explained briefly to the patrolman before he and Hunk climbed in the cab.

"Better we should go to a hospital, huh?" Hunk asked. "You hurt bad, chief?"

Jeff shook his head. "Just creased on the shoulder. We're not going to a hospital, Hunk. We're going back to Monte Brant's house. Maybe we'll land in the hospital yet—if we're lucky. If we're not, it'll be the morgue."

Hunk shuddered. "Me, I don't like that place atall. Better we should go to the hospital."

THE taxi pulled to the curb and they got out. Hunk looked around. He yelled:

"Hey—this ain't Brant's house! We're a couple o' blocks away."

"I know," Jeff said. "Don't tell the whole world about it. We're going into Brant's house by the back way. Got any more bullets in that gun of yours?"

Hunk fumbled in his pocket, found several slugs and inserted them in the breech of his gun. He tucked the weapon back into its holster and plodded along behind Jeff.

They entered a yard neighboring that of Brant's. Jeff moved quietly and whispered a warning for Hunk to try his best to be quiet. A light burned in the study of the house and another on the second floor back. Jeff crept toward the rear porch. He looked up at the porch roof longingly. Hunk grabbed him around the ankles, hoisted him up like he might a doll. Jeff pulled himself over the edge, signaled Hunk to follow and helped the big man up. Hunk lay prone on the roof-top while Jeff crawled toward the lighted window. It was open about an inch and he heard someone groan inside. Another man laughed harshly and spoke aloud:

"You'll keep on talking, old-timer. If you don't, you'll get another dose of the curling iron. It don't feel so good, does it? Now—are there any more pictures of old-man Brant hanging around?"

"No. I told you where all of them were," a man's quavering voice insisted. "D-don't use that iron. I—I can't stand it. My heart!"

Jeff inserted his hand beneath the window, drew his gun with the other hand and suddenly shot the window high. He pushed the curtains aside and centered the gun on the one man standing in the room. The other occupant was lashed to a bed barren of covers and only the springs for a cushion.

The ugly-looking thug was bending over the old man, a curling iron smoking slightly in his hand. He spun around, reached toward his hip pocket and thought better of the act. Instead, he swore and raised his arms.

Jeff climbed into the room. Hunk

came in after, pulling the curtains with him.

"Over against the wall," Jeff ordered. "Hunk—that man tied to the spring is Jenkins, the real butler of this house. This very tough guy here was torturing him. Take care of the mug, will you?"

HUNK was more than eager to oblige. He stepped up to the scowling thug, unleashed an uppercut that didn't seem to pack much steam and almost tore the man's head off. He gently eased the unconscious crook to the floor. Jeff was busy untying the old man on the bed.

"You are Jenkins?" he asked.

"Yes. Oh, yes—and you are friends! You must be! Thank you! I—I didn't think I could stand much more of this. They—they were forcing me to tell all about the house and the family. I told them lies. Told them I had a sister, hoping someone who knew me might realize something was wrong."

"Do you know why?" Jeff asked. "Now raise that right arm of yours. Easy, because I can see you've been tied here too long and you're apt to be pretty stiff."

Jenkins groaned. "I don't know why. They took me out of bed one night—days ago. I was taken to some house and kept there until this afternoon. Then they brought me here, tied me up and tortured me. There are four or five of them."

Jeff helped the old man into a sitting position. "Now you're okay, but don't make any noise. We're going to clean up the rest of this mess. You stay here."

Jeff headed for the door, stopped and signaled the others to remain very quiet. Someone was coming up the stairs. Jeff slipped behind the door. It opened and Harrison Brant swaggered in.

"Find out if Brant had a bank account," he ordered. "I want to know——"

He stopped short, for Jenkins sat on the edge of the bed. Hunk grinned at him and a gun pressed against the arrival's spine.

"WELL, Mr. Harrison Brant," Jeff said unpleasantly. "Since when did you begin to torture your own butler—one who's been in the family for years? You didn't fool me long. You're not Harrison Brant. Where is he?"

"Find out!" the man who posed as Brant, snapped the answer. "Damn that kid—we should have nailed him before he reached your office."

"I'll say you should have," Jeff said. "He told me Jenkins had no relatives, no friends. Then how could that phony downstairs visit his poor sick sister and you back him up when he didn't have a sister? That gave the play away. What's it all about?"

"Looking for a cut?" the pseudo-Harrison Brant asked hopefully.

"I'm looking for the men who murdered young Brant—and probably his father, too!" Jeff faced the elderly servant. "Jenkins, is this man your master?"

"No! No—he isn't! He looks like him, remarkably so; but the master was kind and gentle. This man is mad. He—he handled that curling iron several times. And that other one, who took my place. He was to say that he was the new butler."

"Except with me," Jeff corrected. "He pretended to be you, so I wouldn't get suspicious. Hunk, this guy likes to torture people. Haven't you a special treatment for mugs like that?"

The false Harrison Brant saw one of his men in a heap on the floor. He tried to step back, but Jeff's gun held him at bay. Hunk hitched up his trousers, spat cheerfully into the palm of his hands and doubled them into vast fists. He measured his victim's jaw, grinned, and let drive. The fake Harrison Brant went down like a brick.

"Okay," Jeff said. "Tie him to those springs and let him see how much he likes being chained that way. I'll take care of the other one. Jenkins, you sit tight. Stay here, and if either of these men wake up and squawk, biff him with that chair in the corner. Hit him hard."

"Yes, sir," Jenkins agreed readily. "It would be a pleasure, sir."

CHAPTER IV.

FAMILY OF FAKES.

THE prisoners firmly tied, Jeff led the way into the hallway and toward the staircase. He could hear men talking below. With Hunk beside him, they stole down the steps and into the study where Harrison Brant spent most of his time. The thugs were in the next room. Hunk had his service pistol in his hand. It scraped across a table top, slipped from his grasp and skittered beneath a stack of loose papers on the table. Hunk swore beneath his breath and started pawing through the papers. They crackled loudly.

Ahead of him, Jeff rapped softly, "Come on, you!"

Then the detective came back to Hunk, motioned the big fellow to bend down and put his lips against his ears.

"You're about as useful as an elephant here. Go back to that room, slip out the window and phone Halligan. Tell him to get here fast."

Hunk nodded and crept up the steps again. Jeff took a firm grip on his gun, reached for the door and started to push it open. He heard a sound behind him. He whirled, but he was too late. One of Keller's men stood ten feet away, a sub-machine gun nestled in his arm. He looked at Jeff with an amazed expression.

"I—I thought——" he began.

"You thought you mowed me down with that Tommy gun, didn't you?" Jeff accused. "But I don't die that easily."

Jeff spoke aloud. There was no use in trying to hide now. His only hope lay in the speed with which Hunk reached Inspector Halligan.

Keller barged into the room with a drawn gun. He saw Jeff and swore.

"What the hell! I thought you were finished."

"Not me"—Jeff let his gun drop to the floor—"I'm tough."

Keller stepped up to him and swung his gun down in an arc that raked a gouge in the private detective's cheek.

"We'll see just how tough you are. This time your light goes out for good. First, though, you'll tell me what you know."

"Why not?" Jeff crossed his legs and relaxed in the chair. He was stalling desperately, but he controlled his nerves with an effort. He was very, very close to death, and he knew it. Keller was primed for the kill, eager to start shooting.

"Okay—talk!" Keller rasped.

"YOU fleeced young Brant out of all the money he could lay his hands on," Jeff started. "Then you got wise to something in which there was a fortune. To get that, you had to put Harrison Brant out of the way—but do it so that things would look perfectly normal. You got a man who resembled Brant. I think you killed the real Harrison Brant. Then you kidnaped his butler first, to get all the information your impostor needed in order to carry on. After Monte left for my office, you got his father. One of your torpedoes killed Monte, tried to get his wrist watch because, I suppose, Jenkins had told you Monte carried around a photo of his father and mother. The killer didn't have time to get it. But I did, Keller."

"You're crazy," Keller said sharply. "Halligan's got his man locked up now."

"Sure he has. He thinks so anyway, only I know your hood has an alibi that can't be beat. At the time of the murder, he was being dressed out of the jail after serving a short sentence. When they try him, he'll go free; but by then you'll have your hands on whatever it is you're after. All you want is to have the police think the murder of Monte is cleared up, so they won't bother you."

Keller sat down, but his gun was trained on Jeff and three of his men stood around prepared to shoot at the drop of a hat.

"You're never going to leave here," Keller said. "So I'll tell you what I'm after. Monte lost dough in one of my games. He tried to pay up with some funny-looking bonds. I laughed him off, but I had a look at them bonds and I found out they're worth plenty. Old man Brant owned a heavy interest in a diamond field in South Africa. It's panned out, but he never even knew it."

Jeff closed his eyes resignedly. "So that was it. They were rich all the time and didn't know it. Your fake Harrison Brant would put in his claim, collect his dough and then disappear. Old Jenkins would be murdered and you'd be clean. Nice work, Keller. Very nice, only you can't get away with it."

"No?" Keller said. He stood up slowly. The gun was dead center on Jeff's chest. "I think I will get away with it. It's coming now. Where'll you take it—in the head or the heart?"

"Neither place, thank you," Jeff said coolly. "You won't shoot, Keller, because if you do, it's all up with your plans. Haven't you wondered where my right hand is? The big guy? I'll tell you. We took your fake Harrison Brant out of here. Hunk is staying with him and if I don't come back, your man goes to see Halligan. He'll talk, and you'll run like the rat you are."

Keller turned a ruddy hue. "You're lying," he accused.

"No, he ain't, boss," one of the men spoke up. "Joey went upstairs and he never came down again He'd hear us if he was okay."

"Where is he?" Keller rasped. "Talk, damn you, or I'll split you wide open."

"And let yourself in for a trip to the chair?" Jeff asked cheerfully. "Nothing doing. I walk out of here or Hunk will wring your man's neck. It's up to you, Keller."

One of the crooks suddenly motioned for silence. "Somebody's comin' down the steps."

JEFF held his breath. Halligan's men wouldn't slip in through the upstairs window. They'd smash the door and come in with flaming guns. He could see the stairs from where he sat, and Jeff's heart sank deep into his shoes. Hunk, alone, was softly creeping down the steps, utterly oblivious to the creaks of the boards. He looked like a great Dane on the prowl.

Keller signaled his men. Hunk walked into the room to face three guns. He groaned and cursed alternately.

"The devil!" Keller cried. "This punk *was* upstairs all the time! An'

I'll bet anything he's phoned the cops!" He quickly covered Hunk with his gun, motioned him over beside Jeff. He continued with a leer, "So now you both get it together—fast!"

Hunk was a little slow in getting started toward Jeff. Keller, enraged, gave the burly man a rough shove forward.

Hunk, looking bewildered, stumbled, and his hands pawed outward as he fell half across the table top. Then, without warning, he was whirling around and there was a menacing gat in his hamlike hand. The service pistol was abruptly smoking and Keller was clutching at his middle, doubling up. There was a look of astonishment and terror on his evil face.

One of the other crooks brought down the sub-machine gun he carried. Hunk's gun blasted again. The Tommy gun dropped to the floor. Just then Jeff went into a nose dive, scooped up the gun and pressed the trigger. The other two thugs were shooting fast. One of them folded up with the first salvo from Jeff's gun.

The last one started a line for the door. Hunk was after him in a flash. Running behind the terror-stricken man, Hunk doubled his fist, raised it and brought it down like a sledge hammer on top of the crook's head. The man's knees buckled and he collapsed. Hunk wiped perspiration from his forehead.

"Maybe," he said, "it was better I should 'a' gone for the cops, huh? Only it was like this, chief. That gun is city property, see? I was supposed to turn it in when I got canned. Only I forgot, an' Halligan told me he'd have me pinched for theft if I didn't hand over the gun. So I figures maybe it's better I shouldn't go to him without the roscoe because maybe he'll toss me in the can before I can explain the jam you were in. So upstairs I phones him and comes back here, thinkin' you had all these guys sewed up."

Both men could hear police sirens in the distance now. Hunk kept on talking:

"I dunno what made me forget the roscoe an' leave it on the table here —— Oh, yeah—I remember! I made a noise with the cannon an' you says for me to go easy, so I puts the gun down. Yeah—that was it. Better I should 'a' put it in my pocket, I guess. Huh, chief?"

Jeff grinned. Hunk was scowling.

"You says I ain't to call you chief, but I do it just natural. Better I should go home, huh? Better I should——"

"Hunk," Jeff said, "you got a job. We'll look for lost people and stumble on murders like this one. We don't get paid on this case, but boy—it's worth it to settle Keller!"

"Yeah," Hunk agreed. "Yeah, sure—chief!"

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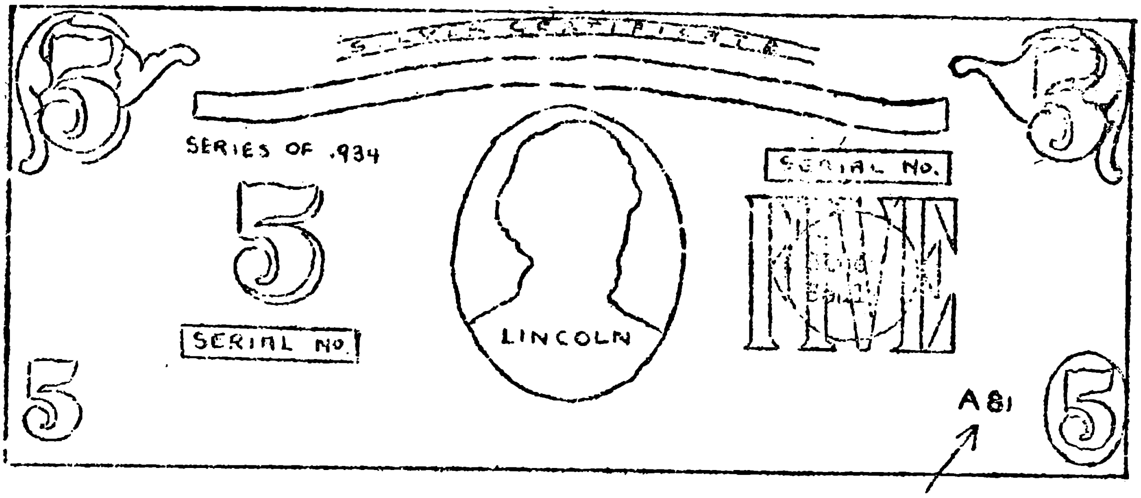
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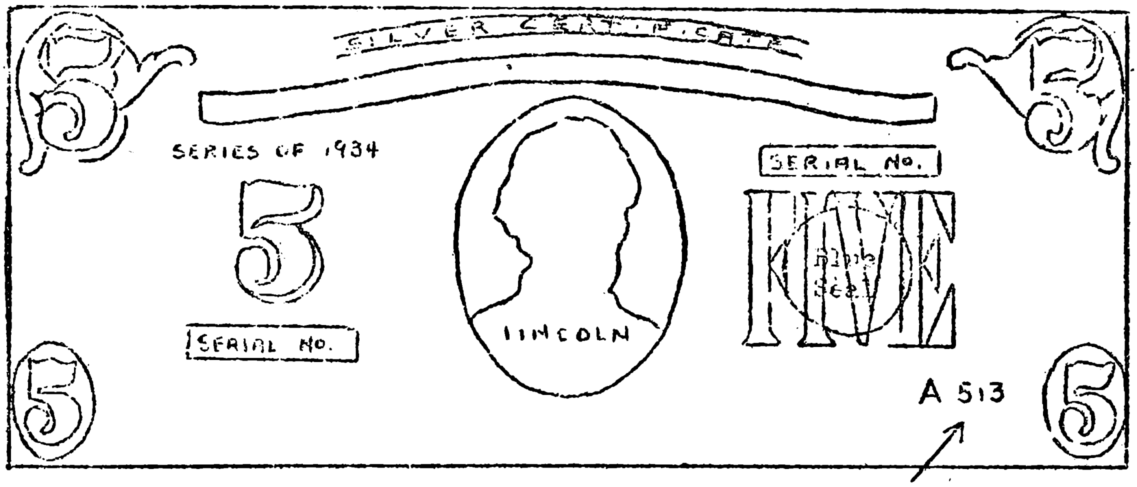
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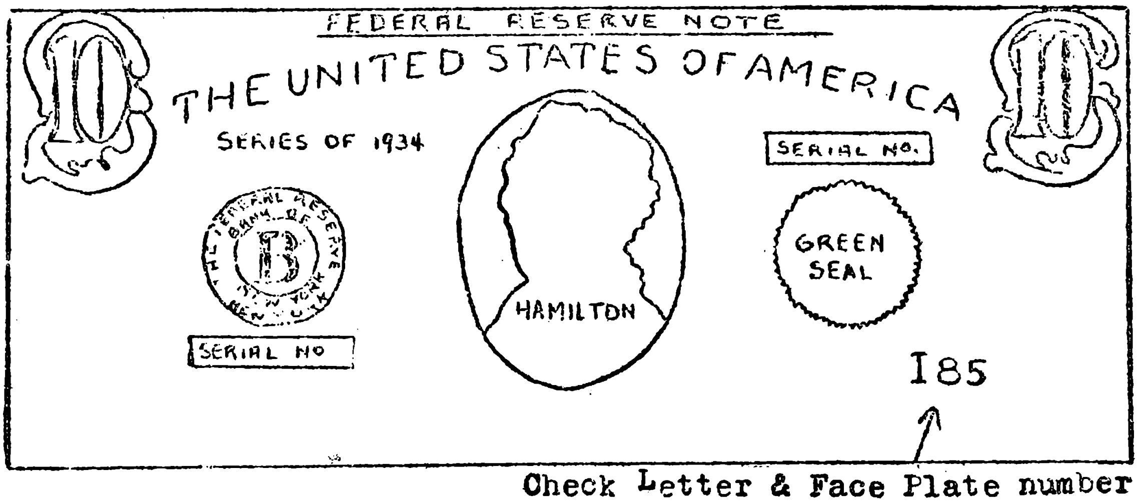
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Reproduction of part of the notice sent out by the Secret Service in its campaign against counterfeit money.

How To Spot Counterfeit Money

It's Easier To "Make Money" By Spotting Counterfeiters Than It Is To Counterfeit Uncle Sam's Currency

IF you want to make a lot of quick, easy money, here's one way that you shouldn't try to do it: Don't try to make money! It doesn't pay. It seems easy and simple, but you can't get away with it. Uncle Sam has a practically perfect record as far as the protection of his currency goes; no matter how smart a counterfeiter you may think you are; no matter how perfect a duplicate of government money you can make, the chances are all against you ever getting away with it. No one has succeeded in doing it as yet; probably no one ever will be able to do it, because the integrity of the nation's financial structure depends upon the impossibility of this. And the United States Secret Service has, as its major task, the job of seeing that this is not done!

Money is probably the most interesting subject you can ever bring into conversation. Money plays a very important part in our lives, even if we do not wish to be too materialistic about our existence. It is one of our most commonly handled objects of living. Yet, with all that, it remains, to most people, one of the major mysteries of life. It has been responsible for countless losses to innocent persons, all because they did not take sufficient time and interest to learn enough about it to feel that they could handle money without risking too much.

United States currency consists of the metal coins and the paper bills. They are so freely and so continuously handled, passed from one person to another, perhaps stored away as savings, that no one gives them a second thought. You may know that there is a Lincoln head on the penny, but recall vaguely that there is either an Indian head or a Liberty head on the five-cent piece; start thinking vaguely of the different designs on the quarter, the half dollar, and, if you are in the West, even on the silver dollar. But were you asked to describe any of them exactly, you would be entirely lost.

When it comes to the bills, you would be even more at sea. How many of you can tell the approximate size of a dollar bill? If you recall the paper currency that had been used some years back, do you remember whether it was larger or smaller than the present currency? How are the figures put on the bills? Whose picture appears on the different denominations?

Just what *do* you know about bills?

Because so few people really know very much about what should be on bills, and how it should be there, counterfeiters have a very easy time to pass the first few bills they make. The public is so used to taking something that looks like money that you can, in many cases, pass off one of the "rubber" bills that street-hawkers at carnivals and other expositions sell as novelties—do it illegally, too, for nothing that might in some way be confused with regular currency is permitted to be offered for sale. Even reproductions of currency are not allowed.

Though the counterfeiter may have very little trouble in passing the bill to his first sucker, he soon finds that the government is on his trail. Why? Because, in the course of our regular trend of business, that money very shortly gets into the hands of a bank, cashier, or some other person who handles a great deal of money and who must be able to tell the difference between the good and the bad. That immediately starts the alarm, and the vast organization of the Secret Service, especially efficient in its tracing down of counterfeit money, gets going.

When a report comes in that counterfeit money is found, the first thing to do is check the counterfeit for signs which might possibly be a lead to the man who created it. Counterfeiting, the same as any other business, talent, or crime, follows certain lines. It has its "specialists" whose hand can be seen in any number of ways. Counterfeiters have their "modus operandi" just as do any other criminals.

When this is checked, the Secret Service organization knows how to go about tracing the suspected sources of the bill. The job is started, and it is not stopped until the solution is found.

In the meantime, it is necessary to do all possible to avoid a further distribution of the counterfeit, so as to prevent the losses that would be incurred. How this is done depends upon the concentration of the counterfeit currency.

If the bills are centered upon one locality or section, the division of the Secret Service which covers that locality issues a special bulletin to all banks, theatres, restaurants, hotels, merchants, and others who have occasion to get money from the public. The bulletin is a warning concerning this particular counterfeit, pointing out the errors in it, and other ways in which it can be readily spotted.

If the Secret Service has available any other information which might aid in spotting the counterfeiters, this is also added. This service is entirely free, of course, and practically every businessman who has to handle money makes sure that he is on the mailing list of his nearest Secret Service headquarters. What serves as a tremendous help to make the public coöperate is the fact that counterfeit money, whenever spotted, is seized by the government. The merchant who accepts counterfeit money will, nine times out of ten, lose that sum out of his own pocket, unless he spots the passer, for when the bank receives his deposits, the counterfeits are turned over to the government, and he gets no credit for them. This seems a rather harsh way of treatment, but that it is the only way to accomplish anything will be pointed out later.

ALONG with the notification of any counterfeit money goes a full description of its faults and good points, so that any such bills may be more readily spotted. The accompanying illustration is a reproduction of an actual notice sent out resently by the New York division of the Secret Service. Along with this sketch, the following message was sent, giving the descriptive aids:

"CONFIDENTIAL WARNING"

"New and Dangerous Counterfeit Notes:

"Attached hereto are diagrams of three new counterfeit notes appearing in circulation in and about the City of New York. Each diagram is numbered to correspond with the following descriptions:

"No. 1. Counterfeit $5 Silver Certificate, Series of 1934, bearing Check Letter A, Face Plate No. 81, in small type in lower right corner of face of note, and Back Plate No. 855 in lower right corner of back of note. The shading in the portrait of Lincoln is poor, and the entire face of the bill has a gray appearance. NO THREADS APPEAR IN THE PAPER ON ANY OF THESE COUNTERFEITS, BUT ATTEMPTS MAY BE MADE LATER TO IMITATE THE FIBRE BY MEANS OF RED AND BLUE PEN AND INK LINES. The back of the note presents a blotchy appearance, with many solid green tones instead of the shading shown in the genuine. The *printed surface* of the back is nearly one-quarter inch shorter than the genuine. The serial number type design is unlike the genuine and is about 1|16 inch shorter. SERIAL NUMBER OF SPECIMEN IS B65810335A.

"No. 2. Counterfeit $5 Silver Certificate, series of 1934. The description of this note is as the same No. 1., except that the small number after the check Letter A is 513 instead of 81, and the back plate number is 55 instead of 855. THESE NOTES TO DATE ALL BEAR SERIAL No. B65810335A.

"No. 3. Counterfeit $10 Federal Reserve Note; Federal Reserve Bank of New York, denoted by large letter B in circle at left of note. Check Letter I, Face Plate No. 85, Back Plate No. 428. To date the serial numbers on notes of this issue have begun with the letter C, but should begin with the letter B. SERIAL NUMBER OF SPECIMEN is C53810356A. The FIGURE IN THIS NUMBER ARE THE SAME AS THOSE SHOWN IN NO. 1 and NO. 2, EXCEPT THAT THEY HAVE BEEN CHANGED AROUND. ON NOTES OF THESE ISSUES, WATCH CAREFULLY FOR A TRANSPOSITION OF THESE NUMERALS.

"When you detect a counterfeit note, do not return it to the customer. Delay the customer and telephone Police Headquarters (CANAL 6-2000). If the customer leaves before police arrive, WRITE DOWN his complete description and if he approaches or enters an automobile, WRITE DOWN the license number.

"REWARDS ARE PAID FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO THE ARREST OR CONVICTIONS OF PERSONS MAKING OR PASSING COUNTERFEIT MONEY.

"Room 804, 90 Church St., New York, N. Y.

"Telephone RECTOR 2-9100, Extension 215, 216, 217.

"WM. H. HOUGHTON,
"Supervising Agent."

Notice that in the description given, there are certain identifying factors which are used as a basis of description. These are points which can be readily learned by the general public, and if remembered, will serve to avoid acceptance of much counterfeit money, and accordingly bring about an increased number of convictions.

Because the currency in use in this

country comes to such staggering figures, and because its issuance depends on various sources, a definite system has been adopted to easily identify each issue, and to keep that identification after a definite pattern. The paper money issued includes Silver Certificates, United States Notes, National Bank Notes, Federal Reserve Notes, and Gold Certificates. The purposes and conditions under which each is issued has no part in this discussion; what we are interested in is the distinctive marking of each.

All the bills are of the same size; all are printed upon the same type of paper, according to the same process. The general appearance is the same. The first point of distinction is to look for the Seal and the serial number, which are printed in different colors to denote different issues. The Silver Certificate has this seal and number in blue; the United States Note in red; the National Bank note in brown; the Federal Reserve note in green, and the Gold Certificate in yellow.

This may seem a very minor point, and certainly not one that might be the means of tripping up a counterfeiter. But many counterfeits have been passed which erred in this color scheme, and had the general public been more aware of this arrangement, such counterfeits would have had shorter life. Many an otherwise excellent counterfeit owes its downfall to the overlooking of some such detail, and in the battle against those who would filch money by means of counterfeit bills, no point is too small to overlook.

ANOTHER point which is often overlooked is the manner of marking the notes issued by the Federal Reserve Banks. These notes, in addition to having the lettering "Federal Reserve Note" in the upper part of the face of the note, have in addition an extra check in a letter and number which designate the particular bank issuing the note. There are twelve Federal Reserve Banks in the country, their addresses and their letter-distinctions being as follows:

Boston, 1–A
New York, 2–B
Philadelphia, 3–C
Cleveland, 4–D
Richmond, 5–E
Atlanta, 6–F
Chicago, 7–G
St. Louis, 8–H
Minneapolis, 9–I
Kansas City, 10–J
Dallas, 11–K
San Francisco, 12–L

If you look at a Federal Reserve note, you will note that the round black seal to the left of the portrait carries the name of the Federal Reserve Bank around a large initial. This initial is whatever one is designated for that bank, and the number that goes along with that initial appears in all four corners of the face of the bill, inside the border. Remember, this is not the treasury seal, which is printed in the colors mentioned before to the right of the portrait, together with the serial number of the bill in the same color.

Another major point in our currency, and one with which we should all familiarize ourselves, is the reproduction of portraits which appear on the bills.

Do you know whose picture appears on the dollar bill? Whose picture appears on the five-dollar bill? If you can guess that, can you tell what is on the back of these bills? Each one has a portrait on the front; most of them have pictures on the reverse. Here is what they happen to be:

One-Dollar Bill: George Washington portrait; an ornate ONE on the back.

Two-Dollar Bill: Jefferson portrait; Monticello on the back.

Five-Dollar Bill: Lincoln Portrait; Lincoln Memorial on the back.

Ten-Dollar Bill: Hamilton portrait; United States Treasury on the back.

Twenty-Dollar Bill: Jackson portrait; White House on the back.

Fifty-Dollar Bill: Grant portrait; United States Capitol on the back.

Hundred-Dollar Bill: Franklin portrait; Independence Hall on the back.

Five-Hundred-Dollar Bill: McKinley portrait; an ornate FIVE HUNDRED on the back.

THERE is another very important way of checking counterfeits. As in the case of other points such as these, it would appear that, since this knowledge is more or less general, or can be had by any people connected with the handling of money, it should not prove a stumbling block to counterfeiters. However, these points may present mechanical details which prove to be a stumbling block for those who attempt to make money illegally, and therefore it is good to learn all these points.

The check letter, face plate and back plate numbers are important in detecting counterfeits. The check letter, followed by the small figures of the face plate number, appear inside the panel on the face of the note, in the lower right portion. Do not confuse these letters or numbers with the letters following and preceding the serial numbers. The serial numbers, as explained before, are on the upper right and lower left of the bill, in different colors to match the classification of the bill. Also, do not confuse the check letter and face plate numbers with the symbolic letter and number of the Federal Reserve Bank in the case of Federal Reserve notes.

Look at the check letter on a note —it's in the lower right-hand corner and upper left-hand corner of the face of the note, together with its small check number in the lower right—and make sure it is a letter from A to L. The only exception in the case of this method of checking is in NATIONAL BANK NOTES, where it will not work out. Supposing the letter on your bill is J. Now look at the serial number, and divide that number by six. The result of your division should be a remainder of 4, because the numbers and letters are so synchronized so that each pair of letters has a certain "remainder" number assigned to it. The schedule is as follows:

If the remainder is——

1—the check letter should be A or G
2— " " " " " B or H
3— " " " " " C or I
4— " " " " " D or J
5— " " " " " E or K
6— " " " " " F or L

Remember, of course, that if the remainder and the check letter are correct, that does not necessarily mean that the bill is not a counterfeit; counterfeiters may quite easily match the numbers and letters. But should the remainder not work out as shown on the above schedule, you can be quite positive that the note is not genuine. The government just doesn't make mistakes like that in its currency.

When it comes down to general methods of finding out whether bills are counterfeit or not, one of the first things to note is the paper. The paper on which Uncle Sam prints his money is of a very special kind, and no good duplication of it has yet been accomplished. It has a touch and a feel to it which make you realize that it has strength. It has a crackle and snap all its own, which you will readily recognize if you simply go over a few bills you may have. And most important, it has those tiny blue and red silk threads scattered throughout the surface. They are not printed on; they actually are silk threads put there by a special process. Counterfeiters are baffled by that trick. They have tried printing the threads on in color; they have tried inking them in by hand, and other ways, but they've never gotten them exactly right.

Another way to check is to look at the "depth" of the printing of the note. Our money is produced by the finest engraving methods known, and the best engravers in the world are employed to produce them. It takes both skill and perfect equipment to get finest results. Counterfeiters, either lacking skill, equipment, or the grade of ink necessary, can make a fair copy, but they never get the real color and rich look that a good bill has. Other counterfeiters attempt to overcome these difficulties by using the photo-engraving process. In this, they merely photograph a bill, thus making sure to have an actual reproduction, and then print from those plates.

Such work looks "flat" and dull, compared to real plate engraving. Although the reproduction is perfect, line for line, it can, in many cases, be readily detected by its dead, dull appearance, and it cannot avoid the look of having been just printed "on" the paper, instead of actually "in" the paper, as a regular bill is. This method also makes it more difficult to change the numbers.

In counterfeit notes engraved by hand, there usually is a noticeable lack of quality in the fine criss-cross lines which make up the border and decoration of bills. Likewise, there is a big difference in the quality of the features of the different presidents which appear on the faces of bills. Here again it is skill which shows, and usually the counterfeiter does not have that skill.

Watch for the color on counterfeit bills. Counterfeiters rarely have access to the fine grade of inks that are used by the government, and there very often is a decided "off-color" touch to counterfeits.

There is nothing better than to get yourself thoroughly acquainted with real money in order to avoid taking counterfeits. If you are in a position where you handle money, it is distinctly to your advantage to be able to spot bogus notes without difficulty. Banks and such institutions give their men special training in this; those who must look out for themselves in taking money should make it a point to study it carefully, and thus get the knack of knowing which is good and which is bad at a glance.

The Secret Service advises all people who have doubts as to the genuine appearance of the bill to make sure before they offer change. If possible, keep the person who presents it to you occupied while you get in touch with your nearest branch of the Secret Service, or your local police department. Whenever you get a counterfeit bill, put your initials on it, and turn it over to the United States Secret Service as soon as possible. The Secret Service is always on the look-out for counterfeiters, and offers rewards to people who give them information which leads to the arrest of the counterfeiter, or the passer of counterfeit money.

WHAT OUR READERS LIKE

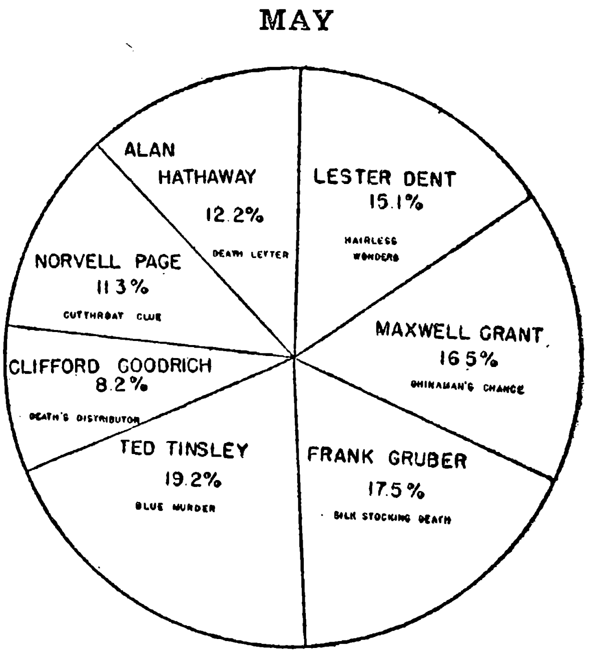
Here is a summary of the May Issue ballots

Here's another chart showing just how our readers voted in their choice of stories which appeared in *Crime Busters*. This is for the May issue, and it proves just how tough a job it is for the writers who are in this competition. We get thousands of ballots, and when the votes are all counted up, we find that the difference between the first and the last is mighty slim! Our satisfaction in that is knowing that our stories have been so selected as to please almost all of you equally well, and knowing that you have really entered into the spirit of things by going along with us in this balloting experiment in wholehearted fashion.

The chart shows that Ted Tinsley, with his Carrie Cashin story "Blue Murder", comes in first. Right after him is Frank Gruber, writing of Jim Strong, the one-man rackets squad. Maxwell Grant and Lester Dent continue right up front; Grant with his Norgil the Magician stories, and Dent with his Click Rush, gadget man, yarns. Alan Hathway's "Death Letter", which was another Keyhole story, comes in next; then Norvell Page, and Clifford Goodrich.

That was a pretty good selection of stories, and a pretty tight vote, and we're glad it turned out that way.

Now, as you remember, we asked you not only for your votes on the stories we printed, but also for your suggestions as to what to print in the future, and other opinions. Among them was your choice of favorite authors.



To date, we've used a couple of dozen different writers, all of them in the top ranks of action writers. Every name that appears in *Crime Busters* is what the publishers term a "cover" name; that is, stories by these authors usually are announced on the cover of the magazine as the best in the book. We try to give you nothing but such writers, and we make sure that the stories they do for us are only their best. *Crime*

Busters, in its less than one year of existence, is considered the "choice" book in the detective field; the magazine in which every good writer should appear in order to hold on to his reputation. That means that we get the cream of material, and therefore, that you get the best.

We are continuing this policy of giving you only the best, and pleasing you by adding to our lists names which you have asked us to get. This issue contains a story by Kenneth Robeson. Mr. Robeson is the author of the Doc Savage novels, which are printed in the Doc Savage Magazine. He does not write for any one else, and it was only because we showed him the many requests from his fans that he decided to write for us. Norman A. Daniels is another name that you asked for, and are getting in this issue.

There are many others that we have scheduled. We can't give them to you all in one issue, but we do all we can to keep your old favorites and give you as many new ones as possible. Laurence Donovan is coming soon; Mark Harper is scheduled for an early issue; Paul Ernst is working on a story now; W. T. Ballard has already done a tale which we expect to publish shortly; Carroll John Daly is still another, and so on. All the time, you can count on authors like Dent, Grant, Tinsley, Page, Fisher, Gruber, Hathway, Davis, Blassingame, Burks, and the others whom we have already given you.

We've also planned a great many special articles, and more of our Famous American Crime Busters series. You've asked us for both of these, and we feel that articles such as the one on counterfeit money in this issue will not only prove interesting, but may also help you avoid loss, or earn you a reward by having you spot some counterfeits.

Keep up your interest; keep on reading *Crime Busters,* because you'll find it better and better with each issue. Tell your friends about it, so they need not miss the joy of reading this swell magazine. And above all, don't forget to keep telling us what you like and what you don't like in *Crime Busters.* We've been following your suggestions eagerly right along, and we want you to continue to feel that we want to know just what you like. That's one sure way of being able to give you your preference. The more mail we get from you, whether it be criticism or praise, the better we feel about it, because it shows you are interested enough to want to do something to help us. Keep it up. We've all done marvelously so far, and there's no reason why we can't do much more if we keep on pulling for it!

CRIME BUSTERS
79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Gentlemen:

Enclosed is $1.00 for which enter my name on your subscription list for one full year of *Crime Busters* magazine, to be mailed to me at this address:

Name ....

Street and Number...

City and State...

Crooks watch out! Killers run for cover! The marines have landed. Or at least one of them—Julian Riley, The Captain, and

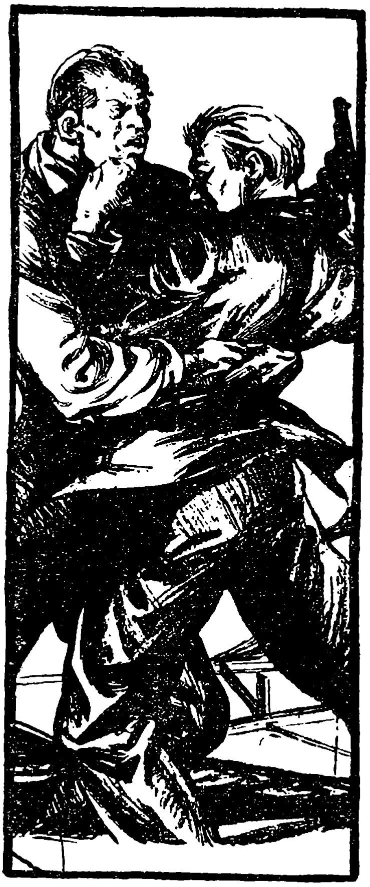
The Captain Cleans Up

By Harold A. Davis

CHAPTER I.

UNEXPECTED CALLERS.

THE two men crept along silently, on hands and knees. Their faces were tense, their palms sweaty. They kept their heads high, staring straight ahead, apparently afraid to look in any other direction. But there was a reason for that. The ledge was narrow, and the street was sixteen floors below.



With an audible sigh of relief, the first one reached out, gripped tightly to the railing of a small balcony, then pulled himself over. A moment more and his companion was beside him, breathing gustily, his thin lips twitching. With a sudden move, he jerked a folded paper from his pocket, held it to his nose and sniffed.

His partner jerked the paper away. "Stow that!" he whispered fiercely. "There ain't to be no killin' on this job unless this guy won't play ball."

The man with the thin lips stopped trembling. His head came up, his eyes glittering. Almost by magic, a gun appeared in his hand. "Don't tell me what to do, Burk," he said softly. "We been paid for a killin'—in case it's needed—and if I feel like it, I'll do it."

Burk hesitated a moment, then shrugged. The other had drawn a silencer from his pocket, was fitting it on the end of his gun. Burk did the same. "I don't like messy jobs," he protested hoarsely.

"Sniffer" spat contemptuously. Silently, he tried the door leading from the balcony. It opened without a sound. Two dark shadows slid inside. Light came from an adjoining room through a partly opened door.

Sniffer crept forward, gun ready, finger tight on the trigger. They had been told not to kill unless it was necessary, but what the hell? The way to do a job was to do it fast, then lam. Burk's breath was hot on his neck. Together they reached the door, yanked it open.

A man appeared in the darkness behind them. Two powerful hands shot out, caught the gunmen by the back of their necks. Their heads were slammed together, hard. They

Earl Mayan 38
ELEANOR

reeled, dazed.

The hand at Sniffer's neck released its grip and the next instant, sliced the gun out of his limp fist. A foot caught him in the back, hurled him sprawling on his face into the next room.

Burk was picked up, smashed into a wall, then tossed carelessly to land on top of Sniffer's limp body. His gun fell from his hand. Short, stubby fingers picked it up.

With difficulty, Burk rolled around, lifted his head so he could see the man now strolling casually across the room toward a desk.

"The Captain!" Burk gasped. Cold perspiration was on his face, suddenly.

THE man turned, picked up a cigar, puffed slowly and dropped into a desk chair. His square face was blank, blue eyes hard, his jaw jutting forward slightly. Julian Riley, known as "The Captain," usually received a second look from those who saw him. And he was worth it.

Standing five

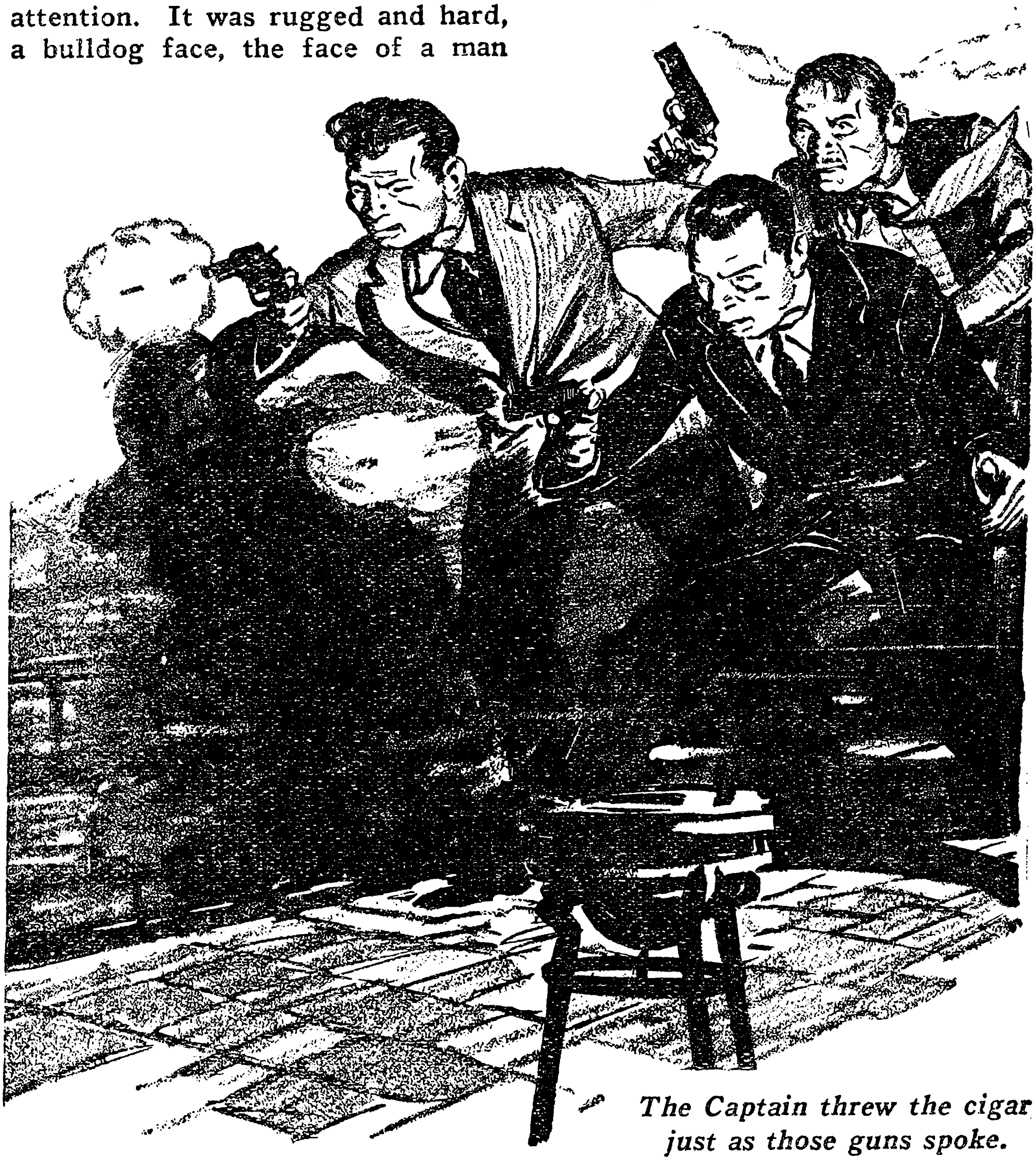
foot ten, with square shoulders and ramrod back, he had the carriage of a man who not only had spent years in the Marine corps, but who kept himself in perfect physical condition. But it was his face that held attention. It was rugged and hard, a bulldog face, the face of a man accustomed to danger and quite capable of coping with it.

His friends called him the man without fear.

"Get up!" he ordered.

Julian Riley's voice was not loud, but it had the quality that brings obedience. Mouth working, Burk struggled to his feet. Sniffer was slow. Sniffer's head was beginning to clear, and his hands twisted feverishly.

"Who sent you here?" Julian Riley rapped at Burk.



The Captain threw the cigar just as those guns spoke.

Burk gulped, ran his tongue over dry lips. "H-honest, Cap, we didn't know this was your place," he stammered. "W-we was just makin' a prowl to see what we could pick up."

The man behind the desk came to

his feet, started forward. Sniffer let out a thin yelp, turned to run.

A huge fist seized his shoulder. He was lifted from the floor as if he were weightless, then shaken hard and dropped. A giant of a man stood there, with round, good-humored face and placid eyes.

"When The Captain asks a question, you answer it right," the giant reproved gently.

Sniffer's courage evaporated; he cringed, face paling. He hadn't been told the man they were to put the finger on was The Captain. He hadn't counted on running into the frozen-faced man behind the desk and this giant, "Truck" Dean, who was The Captain's chauffeur.

"W-we didn't know it was you, h-honest," Sniffer babbled. "B-Burk and me, we was just takin' a prowl and——"

He broke off, jaw dropping. The Captain was opening a window that led onto the street; opening it wide. "Toss the little one out, Truck, then the other one will talk," Julian Riley said calmly.

"Yes, sir!" A grin wreathed Truck Dean's round face. Sniffer was whisked from the floor; was swung toward the window.

The little man screamed. Burk stood frozen. "I'll talk! I'll talk!" Sniffer screeched.

Truck Dean halted his swing. "Yeah?" he prompted.

"We got a call, see?" Words rolled in torrents from Sniffer's thin lips. "We don't know the guy, but he says he's got a job for us. We're to come up here and throw a scare into a fellow. We ain't told who it was, but we come."

The Captain nodded. "And what were you to do here?"

"Just tell you 'Lay off,' that was all. I don't know what it means. I don't want to know." Sniffer was desperately in earnest.

"I think I will go find out," Julian Riley said quietly.

"Then I'll call a cop for these two birds and go along," Truck Dean said eagerly.

The Captain shook his head slightly. "I'm going alone this time, Truck. And turn those two loose. They're just small fry, not worth bothering with."

"But——" Truck's round face flushed. "But, Captain. There's somethin' screwy about this. You might need me——"

He broke off. Julian Riley already had left. A sly grin came to Sniffer's face. He hadn't been entirely honest in what he had said. He *did* know who had sent them.

"And even this Captain guy will get his if he gets in the way," Sniffer thought gleefully.

JULIAN RILEY was inclined to agree with Truck that there was something screwy about the whole thing. He didn't see how there could be any connection between a warning from two petty gunmen to "lay off" and the errand he was on; but there must be. And that was strange, since he'd only received his assignment thirty minutes before and had just been preparing to depart when the intricate burglar-alarm system had heralded the advance of the two gunmen.

Now he lighted a fresh cigar and drove swiftly toward Long Island.

"The Captain" was purely an honorary title. Julian Riley held no official post of any kind. But he was known and feared in the underworlds of many a major city.

A former marine, soldier of fortune and airplane pilot, his job was one that official Washington would not admit even existed. But it was one that provided the adventure that he could not live without.

Actually, he was a trouble-buster, an unofficial agent for the government. He acted in cases where the regular services would be handicapped. Or in delicate cases where, if he failed, the government could disclaim any responsibility for his actions. He was not hampered by regulations; he was asked only for results. He produced those.

But, although his name appeared on no pay roll, although he himself was never seen in Washington, there was a private wire from his apartment to a certain office in The Capitol. And it had been over this wire that he had just received his orders.

"Richard Vanight, II, is mixed up in something," he had been told. "We don't know what it is, and we don't want to appear interested officially until we have something definight. But we're told he's dabbling in matters that might prove really embarrassing to the government. Find out what it is all about."

Richard Vanight, II. A playboy, Julian Riley recalled. He had met him, and rather liked him. But mixed with his Broadway playing, Vanight, better known as "Vanny," sometimes tried to dabble in matters far above his head. An art collector on one hand, he also was rumored to have furnished the money that once caused a South American revolution. Recently, there had been a report of a robbery at his home; but the story had been hushed up——

Julian Riley parked his car in front of a rambling mansion. Other houses, equally big, were near by; other cars were parked along the street. Behind one of these, a man peered out cautiously, a small man with slanting eyes. The Captain did not see him.

Richard Vanight did not seem glad to see his visitor. In fact, something akin to dread appeared in his eyes. He was tall and had been good-looking, but he was not as young as the playboy title Vanny would indicate.

"What can I do for you, Captain Riley," he asked.

"I've been hearing things, things that make me believe you might need some one like me, a professional fighter," The Captain said bluntly. "You were robbed recently, weren't you?"

Richard Vanight walked toward a cocktail-shaker. His lips twitched nervously, but he laughed rather uneasily. "Some one's been spoofing you, Captain," he said. "The robbery report, it—ah—was false. And I've really been behaving myself. I'm not gunning for any one, and no one is gunning for me——"

Blam! Blam!

Lead whined in the room, smacked into the wall. Outside, a man moaned with sudden, unbearable pain.

CHAPTER II.

DEATH IN FLAMES.

A GUN came to Captain Riley's hand. Richard Vanight never did know just how it got there. Before he could move, The Captain was at the window, had thrown it open. Then he dived through. His face had not changed expression.

A man lay on the ground just outside the window. He was twisting around, two hands trying to plug the hole in his belly; but crimson still managed to ooze out. Low, whimpering sounds came from him.

Julian Riley reached down, rolled the man over so he could see his face in light from the window. The man was a small-time gangster, who had run with the East River mob. He wouldn't run any more. He was trying to talk, but only a queer gurgle came from him. Then he became quite still. The Captain dropped him, glanced about.

A gun was lying near the killer's body, but it was certain the man hadn't shot himself. Besides, there had been two reports, and only one bullet had entered the house. It was clear that this man had been shot down by some one else, just as he had tried to kill either The Captain or Richard Vanight.

Which made a liar out of Vanny, because he had been the one near the window when the shot had been fired, and the playboy had just insisted that no one was gunning for him.

A motor roared near by; gears clashed. Captain Riley put his gun back in the shoulder holster. Servants, squawling like frightened chickens, were coming around the side of the house with flashlights in their hands. It would only be a few minutes before police arrived. Riley wanted another word with Vanny before then, and he did not want to stay and greet the cops. He vaulted back into the room.

IT was empty. Richard Vanight had disappeared. Riley recalled the speeding motor and his lips drew back slightly. Evidently, the playboy was more frightened than he had appeared.

A door from the study led into an office room. The Captain entered it swiftly, closed the door behind him. Then he went through papers in the desk rapidly.

He had no legal right to go through those papers; but if that bothered him, he gave no sign. That was why he was a trouble-buster. He could do things that others couldn't.

A check book gave him pause. A recent entry showed a check drawn for $200,000. That was not chicken feed, even for a man as rich as Richard Vanight. The stub did not show who had gotten the money. It merely said "cash."

Then he found something else. It was a small sticker, of the type sometimes put on packages by merchants. It read: "Lin Ong, Importer." He stuck it in his pocket.

Sirens were sounding in the distance, coming closer rapidly. Without haste, Riley walked through the house, went out a window on the far side. As the police came tearing up to the mansion, he was slipping through a hedge, fifty feet away.

Casually, he walked toward his car. The thing was getting even more complicated. But Richard Vanight should be easy to find, and this time Vanny would really talk.

The tail-light of his car was off. It had been on when he had entered the house.

Captain Riley did not slacken pace. A police prowl car was parked not a dozen yards away, but it was empty. The Captain's arms crooked slightly at the elbow. He ducked around the prowl car, came up on the far side of his own machine.

There was a dimly-seen figure in the front seat, twisted to look toward Vanny's mansion. Riley's hands flashed out, caught the other by the throat.

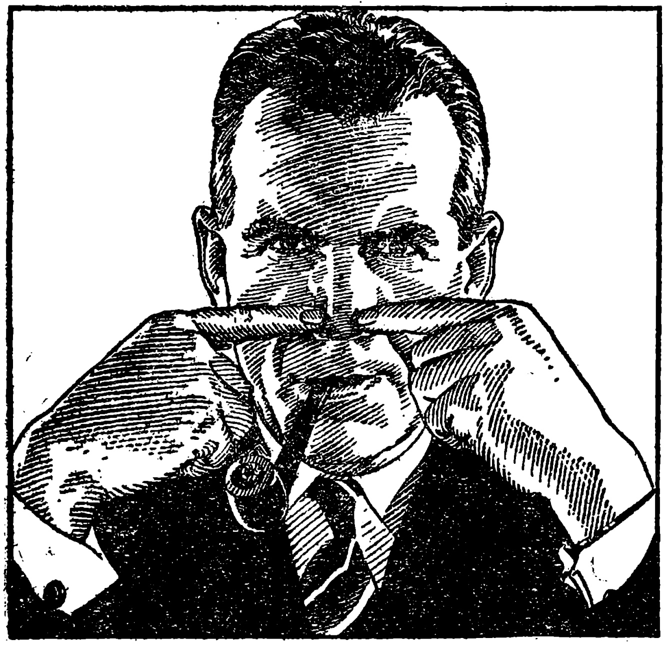
Then his grip slacked. He came as close to looking flustered as he ever did.

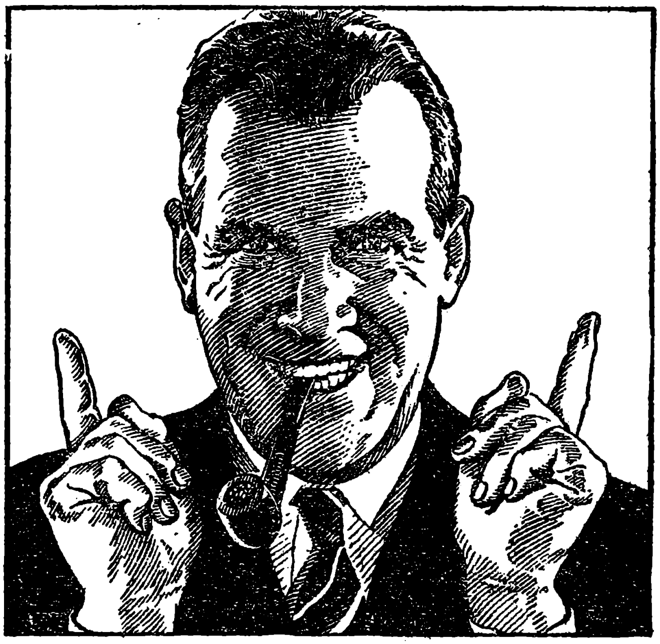
"I—I hope somebody strangles you that way sometime, you brute!" a girl's voice gasped.

CAPTAIN RILEY sighed. "You again?" he asked wearily.

The girl squirmed around in the seat, flicked on the dashboard light and rubbed her throat. She was a pretty girl, missing being beautiful only by a turned-up nose. Curly blond hair came from under her pert

MAKE THIS TEST WITH YOUR PIPE TOBACCO!





1. Do you think that you enjoy the *flavor* of tobacco chiefly through your sense of *taste?* Then make this astonishing test. Pinch your nostrils together while smoking. Notice that your tobacco becomes flat... tasteless... flavorless!

2. *Now let go.* Immediately the flavor returns ... proving that you enjoy the *flavor* of tobacco chiefly through your sense of *smell.* Flavor, you see, is produced only partly by the tongue...*largely* by delicately keen nerves at the back of the nose.

How we found FLAVOROMA for you

Flavor depends mostly on your sense of smell. Knowing this, we set out to produce a pipe tobacco that would appeal to the senses of *both* taste and smell... in exactly the right proportions to produce finer flavor.

And finally—in HALF & HALF—we produced a blend with the very special quality we were looking for... combining taste and aroma in *exactly* the right proportions.

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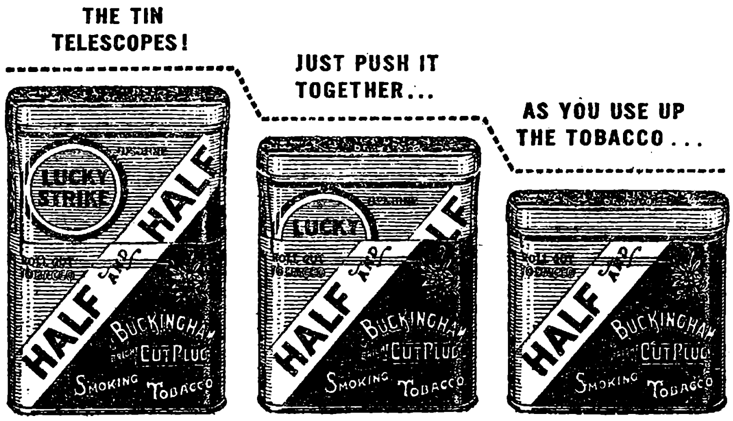

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hat. Her eyes flashed with humor.

"What's the matter, Captain?" she jibed. "Aren't you glad to see your little playmate?"

"You always seem to be getting under my feet," Riley objected calmly. "Sometime, you'll probably really get hurt."

"Don't think it's your manly beauty that has me trailing you around," the girl flashed.

"I don't," Riley shrugged.

The girl smiled, and when she did that she looked really tempting.

"Wherever you go, news seems to pop," she said contentedly. "Therefore, Eleanor Lee goes right along behind. You make the news; I write it."

She paused. Then: "I wonder if the police know you were just going through Richard Vanight's desk?"

"Your story is at the house," Captain Riley said politely. "Go get it. I may have something to tell you later—provided you forget having seen me."

Eleanor Lee laughed, and slid from the car. "I thought you would come to that conclusion. And I won't tell the cops on you—this time."

A FAINT frown furrowed The Captain's face as he turned back toward New York. Eleanor Lee was a reporter on the leading tabloid and a pleasant girl, as girls went. But he preferred girls at a distance. Yet ever since he'd broken up a counterfeiting ring and smashed a gang of passport forgers, she always appeared when he was on a case. She didn't know his real connection, his real job. In fact, she half suspected he was a crook himself. But she did know news happened wherever he was. A smart city editor had assigned her to watch him. He'd had no alternative except to bargain with her.

Then he dismissed Eleanor Lee from his mind. His foot went down harder on the accelerator. The first thing was to find Richard Vanight. It would be interesting to know just who had received that $200,000—and why.

The road wound along the Sound. Water lapped the beach, while expensive yachts and schooners rocked near by. For a stretch, the highway was clear.

A faint glow appeared, not far ahead. It increased in brilliance with astonishing quickness. There was the sound of a speeding car, the hum coming above the smooth pur of the machine Julian Riley drove.

The Captain's foot went to the floorboard. The car almost leaped out from under him. One hand held the steering wheel firmly; the other snaked his gun from its holster. He laid the gun on the seat beside him.

His car rocketed around a curve. A hundred yards ahead was another auto, near the side of the road. An astonishing amount of fire was pouring from it.

Julian Riley braked to a stop, yanked a fire extinguisher from under the dashboard and ran forward. Then he put the fire extinguisher down. It would do no good.

The fire had been started by an incendiary bomb, one that had contained thermite. And now the flames had reached that thermite. Molten, incandescent iron, its temperature over fifty-four hundred degrees, was spreading rapidly. The fire was hotter than the liquid iron that seethes in blast furnaces. Water or ordinary chemical would be useless.

The Captain got as close to the flames as he could. Fire made a vivid picture of the man who hung over the wheel, his entire body blazing.

Riley had found Richard Vanight much sooner than he had expected. But Vanny was giving his answers in another spot now. He'd do no more talking on earth. Some one must certainly have feared what would happen if he did talk.

The Captain's shoulders shrugged; he lighted a fresh cigar. Calmly, he walked back to his own car, got in and shot it forward. Other motorists would be along soon enough. They could turn in a report.

Another motorist did come by, and at once.

A white-faced girl slipped from behind the wheel. She, also, looked at the burning man, and for a moment she thought she was going to be quite sick. She stumbled back to her car, her lips tight. Wherever Julian Riley went, Eleanor Lee intended to go also. And she was getting stories. But——

"This time I think you've got some real explaining to do, Captain Riley," she muttered to herself.

CHAPTER III.

A KNIFE FALLS.

THERE was no longer any danger of Richard Vanight, II, doing anything more to embarrass the government. But there was that $200,000 to be explained. And the forces that had involved the playboy were still very much alive. It had to be something big to involve the murder of a man as rich as Vanight.

Julian Riley knew that his job, far from being over, had just begun. Police would hunt the slayers. He would not only hunt the actual killers, but he wanted to block the reason behind them as well. And there was only one place he knew to start.

Truck Dean's huge form was behind the wheel of the auto as they headed for lower Manhatten. Richard Vanight had not been a man to keep labels off packages without a reason. The sticker that read: "Lin Ong, Importer," must mean something.

"You should 'a' taken me with yuh before, Captain," Truck said plaintively.

"Was it you who told Miss Lee where I was going?" Julian Riley asked calmly.

Truck swung a corner, started down Seventh Avenue. His ears grew a cherry-red. His round, good-rumored face twisted uneasily.

"Ah, Captain, I like her," Truck protested. "She's so little and soft—and sorta needs a big man to help her now and then."

Captain Riley said nothing. Truck twisted some more. "I—I never tell her anything that counts, like what your job is, or what you really do on these cases," Truck argued. "I—I just give her a tip now and then when you're goin' out——"

He broke off, his mouth still open, his eyes wide as he stared into the rear-view mirror. He stepped hard on the gas.

He was too late. The car he had seen in the mirror had been moving too fast before he saw it. It was a long, gray sedan, and it pulled up alongside almost instantly. The driver was bent far over the wheel, a cap low on his head. The stub nose of a Tommy gun protruded from a rear window.

Captain Riley turned his head. His face did not change expression; but his hand made a sudden, darting move and there was a gun in his stubby, competent fist.

The muzzle of the Tommy gun swung into line. The killer started to squeeze the trigger.

The captain fired—just twice. He

flipped the gun up from the shoulder holster and fired over his left arm, as calmly as though he had been on a target range.

His first shot caught the machine-gunner almost squarely in the forehead. The man slumped forward, killed instantly.

The second bullet entered the neck of the death car's driver. The heavy slug plowed straight through, leaving jetting crimson behind. The car swerved, spun across the street to mount the curb and fold itself up against the brick front of an apartment house.

Truck Dean's mouth closed. Scarcely three seconds had elapsed from the time he had first seen the killers' car until it was all over.

"We wouldn't have kept as slow a machine-gunner as that in the Marine Corps," Julian Riley said quietly.

Truck's Adam's apple went up and down his neck. "Captain, you sure ain't forgot how to shoot," he said huskily.

LIN ONG, IMPORTER, had his shop in a dingy side-street, just off Mott. Truck parked the car a block away.

"These boys sure play for keeps," the big man chuckled.

Captain Riley did not reply. The streets seemed strangely deserted. Usually, no matter what the hour, a few prowling figures could be seen here. Now it was scarcely midnight, and there was no one in sight at all.

Truck did not comment. The giant knew, as did Riley, that many Chinese slept in the rear of their stores. Despite the hour, Truck was sure The Captain would get to ask the questions he wanted answered.

They turned down the side street. There were no lights here. The night suddenly was very dark, and the only noise was the distant roar of the "El."

Truck Dean's huge shape became merely a dark shadow; yet he knew they must be outlined against the light behind, a perfect target if any one were lying in wait. The big man's breath became a little unevenly; his hand cradled an efficient .45.

The Captain froze suddenly against the side of a building, one hand touching Truck's sleeve. Truck eased in beside him.

There had been dim movement ahead of them—a thin blot, darker than the night, that shifted position. Truck's breathing was audible. Captain Riley made no sound at all; his frame was relaxed, his heart beat normal.

Then The Captain started to move ahead. He went so silently that it was hard for Truck to believe he had gone. His body was pressed close against windowpanes. Truck followed.

Riley passed the dark entrance to a stairway. Lin Ong's place was next. The faint movement had been there.

A gun jabbed hard in Riley's back. "Just do not move, please," a voice hissed politely.

Julian Riley did not obey. He spun with incredible quickness. His elbow knocked the gun aside; then his hand smashed down, his finger between the hammer and the shell, even as the other tried to fire. He twisted his wrist sharply, and then the gun was in his own hand.

There was a faint gasp. "Captain Riley?" came a thin whisper. "It must be. No one else could do that trick."

"Liang?" said Riley, and for once there was surprise in his voice.

"Yes, Liang, if you please. And I am glad the honored Captain is with me." Liang spoke excitedly. "I believe we are on the same trail."

Truck lumbered up. "But what ——" he began.

"There is no time, if you please," Liang said swiftly. "Four evil men only just now entered the establishment of Lin Ong. I thought The Captain another of the band. Come with me. I know where we can go —to hear and listen."

TRUCK was mumbling with surprise. Julian Riley said nothing. But part of a puzzle was falling into place.

Liang was one of the aristocrats of China. He had been educated in the United States. And he was the brains of the Chinese Secret Service. The fact that he was in the United States when his counry was undergoing difficulties, was significant in itself.

It must have been Liang who had given Washington the little information it had. It would be like him to hint, rather than give all details.

Now Liang was leading them swiftly through a maze of narrow passageways, up stairways and down.

Riley put two and two together swiftly. "You were at Richard Vanight's home," he announced quietly.

Liang chuckled, but did not slow his pace. "I had the honor of releasing the miserable life from one who was about to fire upon the owner of that home," he admitted. "Now quiet, if you please."

They were in a basement. Above, light came faintly from between cracks around a trapdoor. A ladder led upward.

For a moment, they could hear nothing. Then there were raspings, as of feet scuffling on the floor. Something fell, making the floor shake. Feet raced overhead.

The Captain was first to the ladder. He hit the trapdoor solidly with his shoulders. A lock twisted, but did not break. Again he smashed upward. The trapdoor flashed up.

An aged Chinese was on the floor. Blood was coming from a wicked slash near his heart. His eyes already were closed, his face ashen. Another link had been cut between Richard Vanight and whoever got the $200,000.

Liang's breath came out softly. He spoke in polite Mandarin. "You will tell me where that I seek may be found, Lin?"

The dying Chinese's eyes flickered faintly; then opened. "I ran with the wolves and I have felt their fangs," he gasped.

"Speak!" Liang urged. The Chinese Secret Service man knelt down, eyes anxious.

The aged man opened his mouth, struggled to obey. *"Li-si,"* he started.

A shrill scream came from the street. There was terror in the voice. And it was the voice of Eleanor Lee.

TRUCK DEAN looked slow. He wasn't. Despite his huge bulk, he moved like a sprinter as he darted for the front of Lin Ong's store. But Julian Riley caught and passed him, and Liang was right behind.

The door was locked. The Captain stepped aside, and Truck Dean's enormous weight smashed into panels. The door burst open as if it had been bombed. Truck went to his knees.

A car was pulled up across the street. Even in the dim light, The Captain could make out two men throwing a struggling girl into the rear seat. His gun was out. Now it came up, held steady. Firing under such circumstances might be risky, but Julian Riley showed no sign that he doubted what the result would be.

His finger tightened—only to relax. Truck Dean had leaped to his feet, was running forward like an aroused grizzly. He was directly in the line of fire.

Blam!

A shot flashed harmlessly from the car. The motor whined, and the machine roared ahead. A moment later and it whirled around the corner, with Truck still racing futilely after it.

"Liang!" Riley called softly. There was no answer.

Slowly, The Captain reached for the vest pockets filled with cigars, selected one and lighted it. Liang held the key to the puzzle. But now Liang was gone. Another man had been murdered; a girl had been kidnaped. And the mystery of what it was all about seemed no closer to solution. Still——

Riley walked swiftly toward his car. The aged Chinese had gasped one last word before he died. That had been in Chinese, but Riley had understood, even as he knew a score of other languages.

He knew just where he was going.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MARINES LAND.

ELEANOR LEE had no idea where she was being taken. A gag had been jammed into her mouth. She was forced down out of sight in the rear of her captor's car.

Possibly she should have been frightened. She had been, at first. She wasn't now. She was trying to think.

Following Captain Riley was getting to be almost too much of a good thing. Stories were coming fast enough, but she wasn't in a position to write them.

She had run into the four killers just as they were emerging from Lin Ong's. One of them had recognized her, and she had been grabbed.

"They think I work with The Captain, and that they can hold me as a club over his head," she mused.

Eleanor Lee was intelligent, but the more she thought, the less sense she could make out of the whole thing. Offhand, it looked like there might be a connection between Vanight and Chinatown, which might mean Vanight had been trying to mix in international politics again.

But that didn't sound just right, either. The only good Vanight could do in that line would be to put up money, and he couldn't fork over cash when he was dead. But something big was up. Wholesale murder isn't committed over trifles.

She would have been more puzzled if she had known of the extra passenger the car carried, a passenger who had leaped on the rear bumper, then had concealed himself in the trunk at the rear of the car.

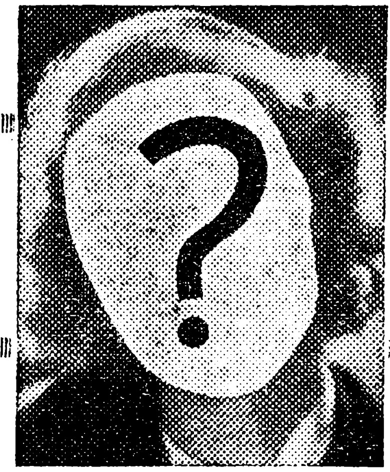
Liang was doubled up uncomfortably, but he endured the jolting with Oriental calm.

WHAT Liang didn't know was that he had been seen when he'd crawled into the trunk. He didn't find that out until some time later. That was when the car stopped. He wasn't given a chance.

One man yanked up the lid of the trunk, a second swung a blackjack with crushing force before Liang could uncramp himself. Liang was dragged out, unconscious.

It was at almost the same moment that fear came to Eleanor Lee. She learned who her captor was.

HOLLYWOOD



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"*Li-si*—The Rat," Captain Julian Riley explained patiently.

"I don't get it, Captain," Truck Dean was not his accustomed self. His ordinarilly good-natured face was set ferociously. He gripped the steering wheel so fiercely that there was some doubt as to whether it could stand the strain.

"Head for Jersey, Truck, through the Hudson Tube. I'll tell you where to go from there," The Captain said quietly.

"What do you mean—The Rat?" Truck gritted. "What I want to know is who got Miss Lee. If she's harmed, I'll—I'll tear them apart with my bare fists." He looked quite capable of doing just that.

"Christened Fred Gleitz, but better known as The Rat. Once one of our better-known public enemies, now supposed to be retired," Riley explained laconically.

Truck Dean became very still. He remembered now, and the look in his eyes was not a pleasant one to see. "The Rat!" He had been a big shot during prohibition; he had been in rackets until they no longer were healthy. A score of murders were charged against him, but none had ever been proved. He was known as probably the smartest, and certainly one of the most merciless criminals ever to defeat justice.

Yet he affected the airs of a country gentleman. He had a virtual castle in the Jersey hills. Rumor had it that a U. S. mint would be easier to get into. If he was in on this case, it meant it really was big. The Rat had money. He didn't take part in small jobs.

Another thought occurred to Truck Dean, and his round face turned white. The steering wheel cracked complainingly, while the car leaped ahead at even a faster pace. The Rat had the reputation of being a torturer, of taking cruel delight in prolonging the agony of those he intended to kill. If Eleanor Lee was in his hands——

"I'll kill him, Captain," Truck growled.

"You know, I had a somewhat similar thought," Captain Riley said. His face was emotionless as usual, but his eyes were smoldering.

THE RAT'S house was set among trees, on a hill. It couldn't be seen from the road. A wire fence was strung outside stone walls that surrounded the grounds and "no trespassing" signs were posted everywhere.

Truck Dean drove the car close to the fence, some distance from the gates. With Julian Riley, he leaped from the top of the car. They cleared fence and wall handily.

The first guard they encountered was caught by surprise. He ran face to face into The Captain. Riley scarcely paused. He swung once. There was a noise like a pumpkin breaking, as his fist hit the guard's jaw.

The guard had been on his way to report. The Rat ran things on military lines. When the guard didn't show up five minutes later, a warning was sounded.

The Captain and Truck didn't know that. They were slipping closer and closer to the big stone house.

Men sprang at them from all sides. Julian Riley got his gun out, only to have it knocked from his fist by a blackjack. A second blow caught him on the side of the head.

Truck Dean was bellowing. His treelike arms were flaying with savage purpose. His huge body seemed to absorb punishment without effect. He hurled one man into a tree. The man's neck broke.

Julian Riley had been knocked to his knees. He shook his head, came up just as his attacker was swinging a blow that would have fractured his skull. He caught the man just above

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the knees, spun round and round. The man's body knocked others flying.

"Run!" Riley clipped.

Dean emerged from a heap of struggling figures. His arms went out, knocking others aside. He started to run toward the house. Riley let go of the man he had been swinging. He also ran.

Blam!

One of the guards fired. Truck stopped in mid-stride. His big figure went down.

The Captain did not pause. One glance had been enough to show that Truck had only been creased. And he had to get away, had to get into the house some way.

Pursuers were racing after him. He made a corner of the house, ducked around it. An old-fashioned lightning rod ran up the side of the house. He went up it, hand over hand. He was out of sight when the first of the guards came into view. They raced on by.

He reached a second-story window, pushed it open and climbed inside. Then he fell on his face as the butt of a gun caught him squarely over the face. Even the lightning rod had been booked to a burglar alarm.

CHAPTER V.

TORTURE—AND DEATH.

CAPTAIN JULIAN RILEY opened his eyes to find he was very securely tied. He was in a small, cellarlike room. Boxes were piled at one side. Some of the boxes were open and he could see their contents. He nodded with faint satisfaction.

The boxes held just what he had expected to find—the only thing that tied together a robbery that was denied, a $200,000 check made out to cash, and the murders of Richard Vanight, II, and the old Chinese.

"Got it, have you, Captain?"

Riley turned his head, his face

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showing nothing. Two men were grinning at him. There was no mirth in their grins.

One of the two was Fred Gleitz, alias The Rat. He was small, with very dark hair and hard eyes. The hair was greased back on his head. His companion was tall and thin, with exceptionally long fingers. His complexion was yellowish. He looked like an Egyptian.

The Captain shrugged, and said nothing.

Gleitz's grin grew broader, even as his eyes grew harder. "I told you, Gyp, this guy is a tough one," he said. "They say he has never shown fear. We'll soon find out about that."

The Egyptian gave a peculiar, harsh laugh. It was something like the noise a crow makes.

The Rat came over and twisted Captain Riley around. The Captain found that he was facing slots in an otherwise solid stone wall. The slots looked down into another room.

Eleanor Lee, Liang and Truck Dean were in that room. All were tied, and Truck looked as though he were still unconscious.

"Get your playmates, Gyp, and we'll see just how hard this guy is," Gleitz said.

"I think maybe you are tough, Captain," the small killer went on. "But I want to know how you react when you are watching your friends

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die. And besides, Gyp brought some playmates along with him that I haven't seen work yet. It should be interesting. Later, we'll really go to work on you."

"You're wasting your time," Captain Riley said. "Kill us and get it over with."

The Rat laughed, lips wide. The Egyptian came back in the room. He was holding a square box rather gingerly. One end of the box was fixed so that it could be lifted up. There were screened air holes in the top.

Riley twisted his fingers around behind him and caught hold of a thread on his coat sleeve, then pulled. The thread came out and a razor blade dropped into his palm. Twisting so he wouldn't be seen, he cut the ropes on his wrists almost in two.

The Rat was peering through another loophole. The Egyptian brought the box over and put it against a third slot. Then he pulled out the end of the box.

Two long, twisting shapes slid through the slot, dropped down on the floor of the room where Eleanor Lee, Liang and Truck were waiting to die.

The girl screamed, her eyes wide with horror. Liang merely blinked his eyes once, then relaxed. Only Truck did not know the horror in store for him.

"Horned vipers," The Rat said gleefully. "Supposed to be among the most venomous of snakes. In Egypt, they believed a horned viper was what Cleopatra called an asp, and used when she killed herself."

The snakes slithered across the floor toward their victims.

THERE was a small derringer strapped on the inside of Julian Riley's arm. It was not large, but it was very deadly at close range. The Captain could free his arms with one quick jerk, could get hold of the derringer before Gleitz or the

Egyptian knew what was going on.

Two shots could kill the two vipers. Or two shots could kill The Rat and the Egyptian.

The boxes behind Captain Riley contained some of the world's most famous art objects. They were worth probably a million dollars. And they had been stolen—had been stolen from Spain and from China, by looters who had taken advantage of conditions there.

They had been smuggled into the United States, Riley knew, probably by the Egyptian. The old Chinese, Lin Ong, had acted as middleman for unscrupulous collectors. Richard Vanight had paid $200,000 for art worth much more.

But then, what he had bought had been stolen back from him. He had first reported, then denied the robbery. And he'd been killed because it was feared he would talk.

It was an excellent racket. It would bring in far more than a million. Other rich men would be victimized, victims really of their own greed.

Then, sooner or later, the story would leak out. Spain and China would set up a big yell. England, France, Germany and Italy would renew blasts at American millionaires who thought their gold could buy art treasures sacred in tradition.

Similar blasts had been made in the past. They always proved embarrassing to the government. Buying stolen art treasures was just as bad as stealing gold. More so, because European nations could set up a howl of moral indignation.

Liang's presence showed how China felt. There would be other wars, but if these art objects were lost, they could never be replaced.

Captain Riley could kill Gleitz and the Egyptian, and might then have a chance to escape, to block their plans. But if he did, his friends would die.

If he killed the two snakes, then

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all would probably die, he along with his friends.

His arms spread with sudden pressure. The ropes, already nearly severed, parted. The small derringer came to his hand. It spoke twice.

Heads leaped from the bodies of two venomous, horned vipers. Eleanor Lee fainted.

THE CAPTAIN slashed the ropes from his ankles. He was on his feet as Gleitz and the Egyptian whirled, reaching for their guns. They were too far away for him to reach them and get a gun before one or the other fired.

He spun, raced down a narrow passageway. Guards were pouring into the room he had just quitted. Guns roared; lead spat about him.

Captain Riley dropped the derringer and raced around a corner. He dived down a short hall; then, he stopped. Only a wall was in front of him. He had run into a blind alley. He was trapped.

The Captain's broad shoulders lifted and fell. Calmly, he reached in his pocket for a cigar. His hands were steady as he lighted a match and turned to face the spot where his attackers would appear. Almost, it seemed, there was a faint smile on his lips, the smile of a soldier who faces execution unafraid.

He brought the match up to the cigar just as The Rat, the Egyptian and half a dozen guards plunged into view. Guns snapped up.

The Captain threw the cigar just as those guns spoke. He dived to the floor in the same instant. Hot lead struck the wall behind him.

Then there was more sound. It was a giant roar, deafening in the small space. Men toppled. The Rat lost his black, shiny hair. It disappeared along with most of the rest of his head. A hole big enough to put your fist into appeared in the Egyptian's belly.

Captain Riley got to his feet, strolled forward. Of those who had been about to kill him, none was left alive.

He went back to where the slots gave him a view into the torture room and dropped the razor blade close to Liang. The Chinese would soon free himself and the others. Liang would know not to let Eleanor Lee have the real story—she would have enough of one, anyway.

And Liang would see that China got its treasures back, and that the others were returned to Spain.

Riley found a telephone, called a Washington number. "The objective has been attained," he reported quietly.

Then he hung up. There might be a minor clean-up job or so to be done, but Liang and Truck could take care of that. He was going back to New York before Eleanor Lee had a chance to ask any questions.

He took a cigar from his pocket, lighted it and puffed with deep satisfaction. But the cigar he was smoking was made of good Havana leaf. It came from the left-hand vest pocket. Those on the right side didn't make good smoking. Made of steel, and filled with tiny, shrapnel-like pellets as well as the most powerful explosive military experts had been able to devise, they really cleaned up when they landed.

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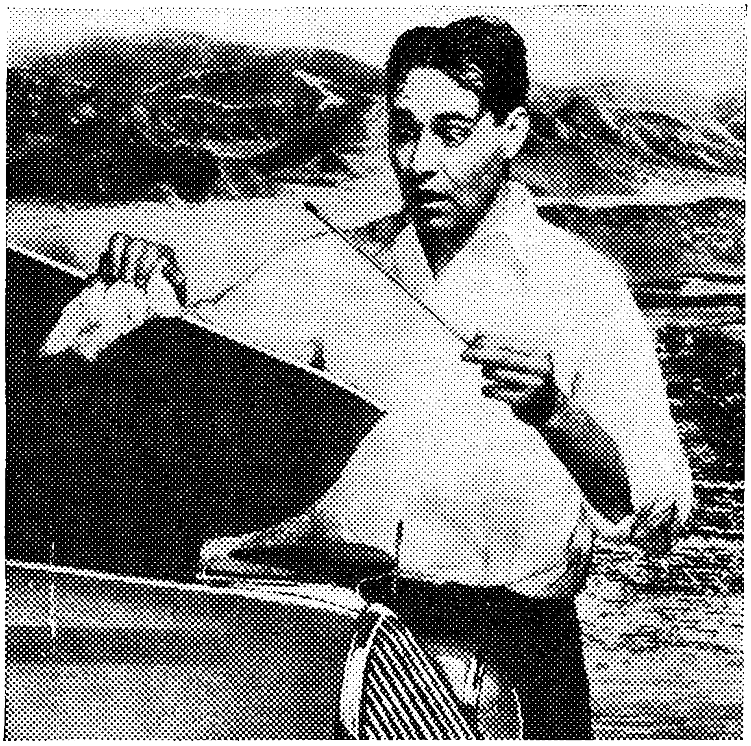

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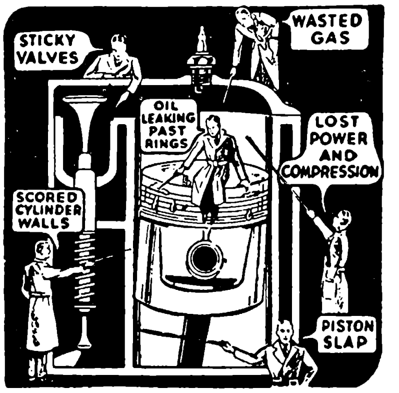

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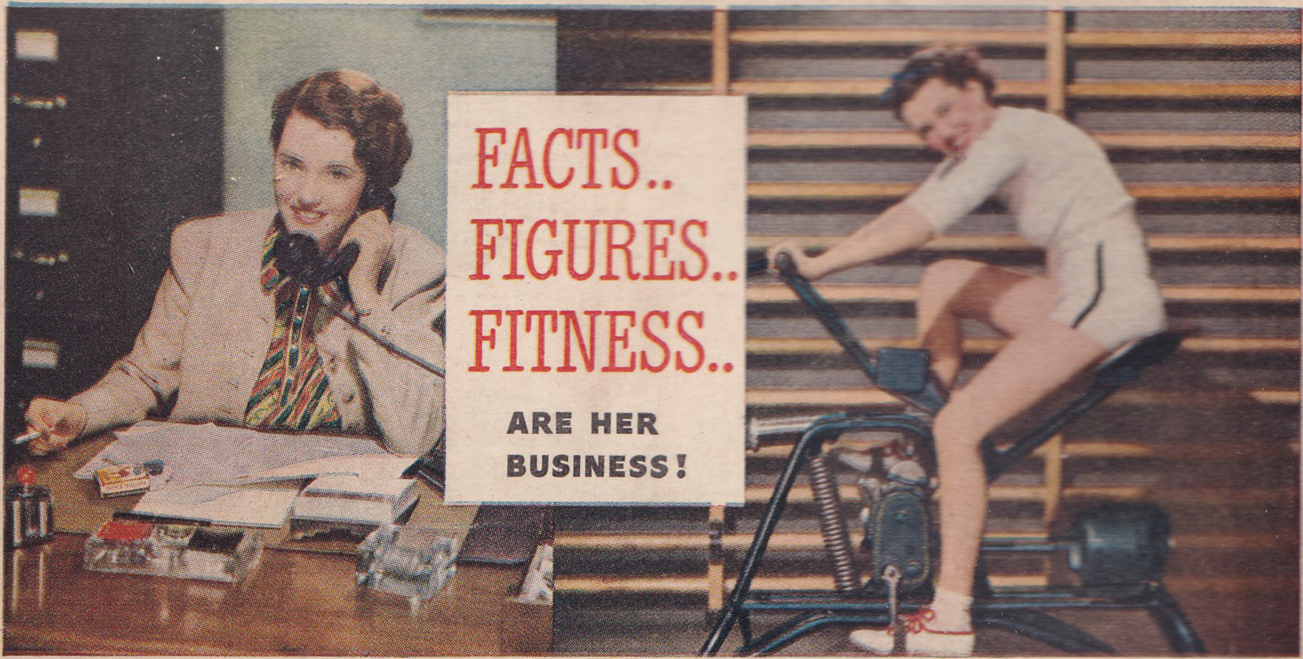
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